

THE FOCŞANI GATE

A KEY TERRAIN FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY



POLICY PAPER



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Editor: Ms. Izel SELIM, New Strategy Center

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Authors:

BG (Ret.) Mircea MÎNDRESCU, Member of the Scientific Council of New Strategy Center, Romania

Mr. Gregory MELCHER, Chief Operations Officer, Centre for the Study of New Generation Warfare, USA

Dr. Phillip PETERSEN, President, Centre for the Study of New Generation Warfare, USA

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Saber Guardian Exercise, photo published by MoD, Laurențiu Turoi 2019

The Focşani Gate - a Key Terrain for European Security

Foreword

The study you are about to read (the authors being in great debt for the time and effort you are going to spend) is about military geography and military training of, and in, an area of the greatest importance for defence and security of Romania, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union.

The aim of the paper is twofold. One is to introduce the geographical characteristics, and, therefore, the operational and strategic importance of the *Focşani Gate*, to a larger audience than the military who, by their very profession, have the duty to know. The second one is to let the public know and to invite it to be assured that military staff analysis (as the process) and military staff analyses (as the products) are conducted and produced by Romanian and Allied specialists.

After a very short strategic relaxation whom the West believed, or at least hoped, to be permanent, it has become evident that *manu militari* is still on some nations' panoplies of conducting active foreign policy. Thus, the World showed itself to be a dangerous place where state versus state aggressions took place, the conclusion from that and from what it is happening every day being that the World is becoming even more dangerous.

In the case of Romania, having in mind Romania's neighbourhood, it can be added to the general conclusion the reality that one of the most powerful, militarily speaking, country in the world, possessing, among other weaponry, one of the most destructive nuclear arsenal, has proved to be politically and strategically restless, choosing to tramp over its word by breaking promises, arrangements and treaties it put its signature on.

Following the aim, the study has two parts. The first one is dedicated to the military geographical description of a fundamental piece of terrain in Romania, called the *Focşani Gate*. The most important idea to be kept in mind is that this key terrain, acting as a mobility corridor, is clustering and, at the same time, it is opening operational and strategic directions that are covering Romanian territory and, more than that, are going beyond it, to the Central Europe and to the Balkans. The logical implication is that the *Focşani Gate* must always be in friendly hands if NATO's and EU's defence are to be ensured.

The second part provides a short description of a training activity Romanian specialists, military and civilian, were subjecting themselves to, within the concept of a *whole-of-a-government-approach*, in order to ensure Romania NATO and EU are defended. The effort for organising and running the activity has been multilateral, the US *New Generation Warfare Centre* and the Romanian *New Strategy Centre* NGOs being deeply involved and providing fundamental contributions, as well.

Speaking, emphasising and demonstrating the overwhelming operational importance of the key terrain that is the *Focşani Gate* for the defence and security of Romania, NATO and EU, is not about subtracting from the importance of other zones in Europe or Euro Atlantic areas. It's not about a beauty contest. The overall scope of the paper, at the end of the day, is to consistently contribute to the building or a realistic image of what protecting and defending NATO and EU implies and requires by helping people arrive at a thorough understanding of the *Focşani Gate*'s role and its importance for the whole of NATO and EU.

The Focșani Gate: The Terrain Setting

The terrain – the all-time possible offset

"Know the enemy know yourself – your victory will never be endangered.

Know the ground, know the weather – your victory will then be total"

Sun Tzu "The Art of War"

Notwithstanding the various dynamic with which different aspects of warfare evolved, including the apparition or disappearance of weaponry, military organisations, formations' tactics or procedures, one issue has stayed unchanged – the terrain aspect of warfare.

Reverting to the famous Chinese General, he directed, that war be studied in terms of five fundamental factors, the third one of which is earth / terrain ("di"). The other four are: the way ("dao"); heaven ("tian"); command ("jiang"); the fifth one being the rules and regulations ("fa"). Further on in his opus *Ping Fa (the Art of War)*, the Chinese writer stresses the significance of knowing the conditions of mountains, forests, dangerous defiles, marshes, and swamps and the degree of difficulty of the terrain.¹

The Geographic Gates

Simply speaking, the overall military capacity (or fighting power as some are calling it) is a vector addition amongst "*the number*" (also named combat power or the physical component), doctrine (or the intellectual component) and morale. In a violent military contest, the acme of skill is to play all these components against the enemy's, so as to achieve superiority over him in order to prevail. It's not only about the quantity nor only about quality. It's always mixed. It's science and art. It's what Napoleon inferred while saying "*I have made all the calculation. Fate will do the rest*".² It's calculation and inspiration.

If there are obvious limits regarding the *numbers* one could engender or even the morale level it enjoys, the intellectual component is a limitless

field. Superiority therein has been the explanation for astonishing military successes in cases where the auspices were the most negative.

Military history is offering a wealth of examples as to how outsmarting the enemy has been materialized in various instances over time.

There is, however, a constant aspect linked with the terrain. Never a victory came without the commandment to milk all the advantages the terrain could offer being respected. Its proper use has always been a must. As well, many times along military history, it has been the offset that withered down disadvantages or unfavourable correlations of forces. In this sense, referring to the terrain - warfare relationship, Carl Von Clausewitz wrote in his "*Vom Kriege*" (*On War*):

"This relationship, to begin with, is a permanent factor - so much so that one cannot conceive of a regular army operating except in a definite space. Second, its importance is decisive in the highest degree, for it affects the operations of all forces, and at times entirely alters them. Third, its influence may be felt in the very smallest feature of the ground, but it can also dominate enormous areas."³

If one takes a bit of time to try to survey, even casually, the Romanian military history's battles map, what is evident is that almost all encounters were fought against superior enemy forces and in difficult terrain. A distinction is worth doing here though. The battle spaces were many times of own choosing whereas the enemies not.

Wooden areas, rivers crossings, bridges, swamps, mountainous choke points or passages, the geographical gates etc, have all been used for military and operational advantages, always weighing greatly in the overall result. The hope was for these confined spaces to erode the material imbalances.

The first mentioning of a battle being fought inside a geographical gate on Romanian territory refers to the Roman Empire's General Fuscus' defeat at *Tapae* (the *Iron Gate* of Transylvania, a narrow corridor between the Western and Southern Carpathians),

¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, (New York: Oxford, 1971)

² <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1061523>, retrieved on the 19th November, 2019

³ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 109

in 87 A.D., at the hands of the Dacians. Until the end of the Roman – Dacian wars (106 A.D.) two additional battles were fought on the same spot but those times the Romans prevailed.

Romania's toponymy contains quite a number of places called "Gate" in addition to the already mentioned *Iron gate*. *Someșului Gate*, *Mureșului Gate*, *Meseșului Gate*, *Focșani Gate* are the best-known ones but not the only ones. With regard to some general features, they are terrain corridors of various size and accessibility that are channelling the movements (operationally the term is manoeuvre) in such a way that they become, in fact, *must-go-through-terrain*. These gates are open both ways and their inside features do not hamper movements, whereas movement outside them is difficult to nearly impossible for some type of military formations. Thus, the label of *must-go-through-terrain*.

The Focșani Gate

The geographical context

From an European military geographical perspective, Romania lies within the South-Eastern European Theatre of War. This Theatre is an area of a rectangular shape whose conventional edges are: in the North: a line linking Mont Blanc – Italian Alps – Austrian Alps – Innsbruck – Linz – Lvov – Kharkov; in the South: a line stretching 100 km South of Africa's northern shore, between Bizerte and Akaba; in the West: w Mont Blanc – w Corsica and Sardinia – the Algerian and Tunisian border; in the East: a line connecting Kharkov – Kerch Strait – Damascus – Akaba. The rectangle's length is about 9500 Km, its width is of about 2300 km. The area that's coming out of these measurements is of about 5,7 mil sq. Km, out of which approx. 50 % is made by sea.

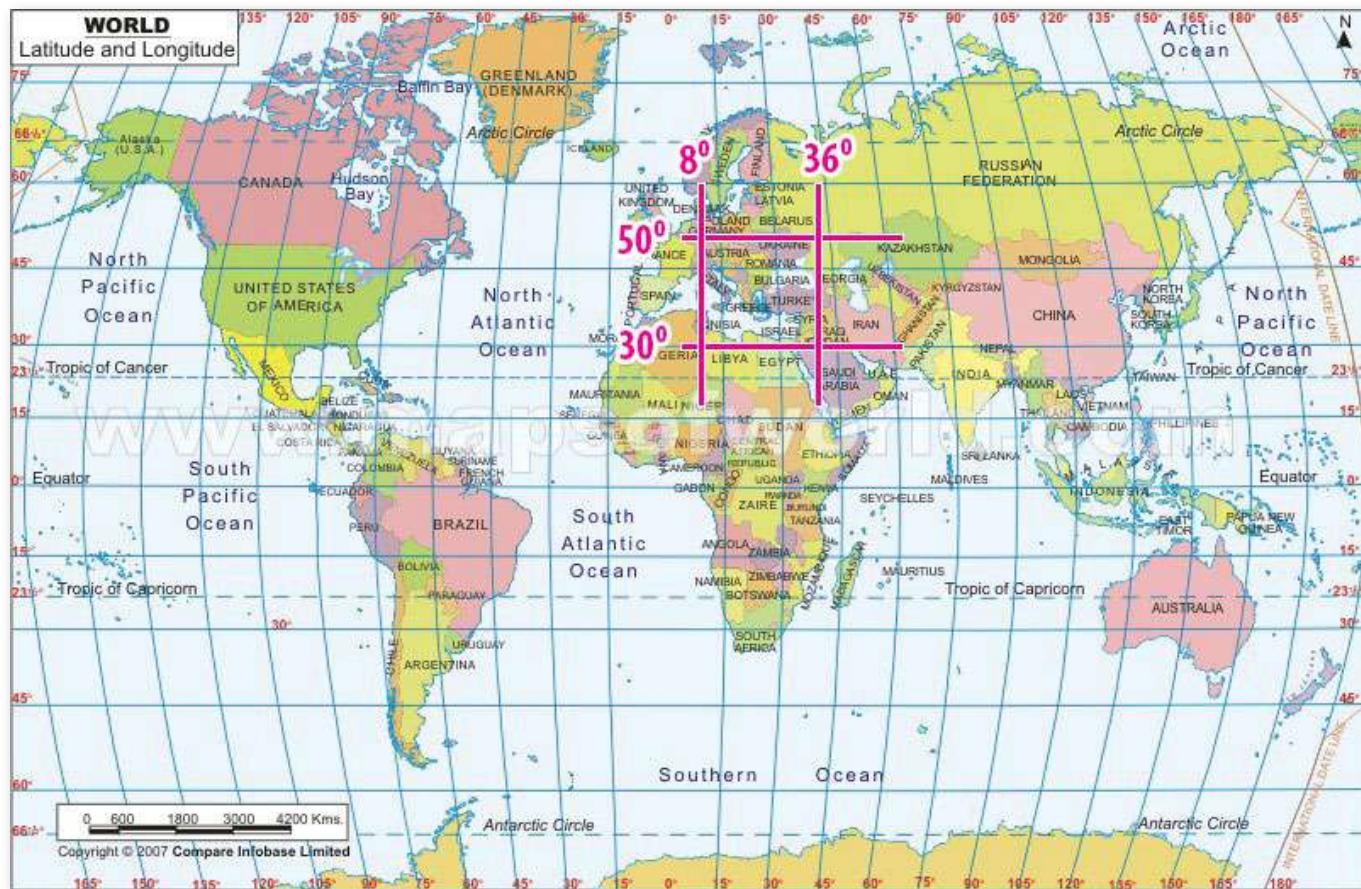


Fig. 1 the South-Eastern European Theatre of War

Source: <http://cardillowiki.pbworks.com/f/1221438812/world-lat-long.jpg>

From the Romania's military geographical perspective, the Focşani Gate lies at the Southern edge of the Eastern Operational Level Zone. Militarily, Romania's territory is deemed as having four Operational Level Zones: Eastern Operational Level Zone; Western Operational Level Zone; Southern Operational Level Zone; South-Eastern Operational Level Zone.

The Eastern Operational Level Zone is the area of Romania's territory comprised within, to the North: the border with Ukraine; to the South a line linking Râmnicu Sărat and South Brăila (Tichileşti); to the East: the Prut River and then the Danube River; to the West: the Oriental (Eastern) Carpathians.

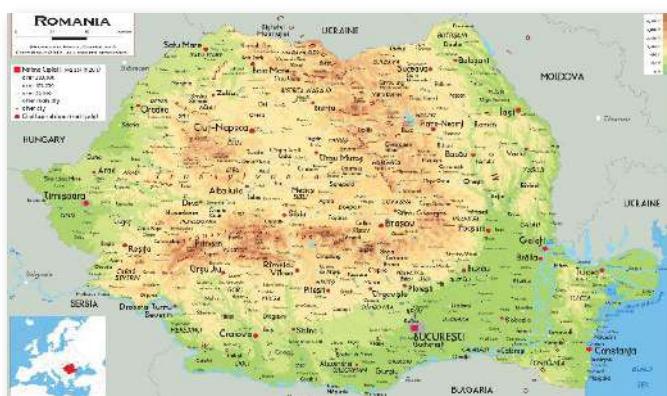


Fig. 2 map of Romania⁴



Fig. 3 The Eastern Operational Level Zone⁴

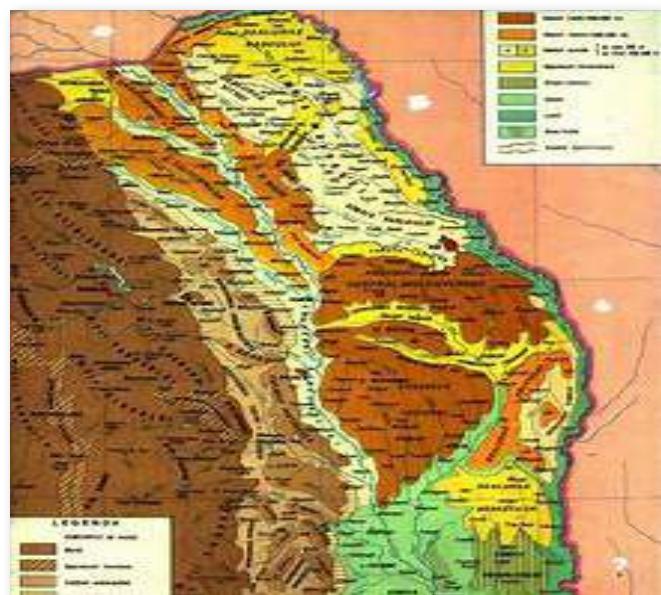


Fig. 4 a relief description of The Eastern Operational Level Zone⁵

The military value of the Focşani Gate is highly dependent and could not be decoupled from the military value of the Oriental (Eastern) Carpathians. The value of the Gate as a *must-go-through-terrain* is conditioned by the successful blocking of the Oriental Carpathians' passes.

The Oriental Carpathians are the longest and broadest (140 km in the northern part), and the narrowest (27-30 km Oituz Pass) among the three Romania's Carpathian formations (Oriental Carpathians; Meridional (Southern) Carpathians; Western (Occidental) Carpathians). The medium elevation of the terrain is 1000 m with the highest peak reaching 2303 m. From the military operational perspective, the parallelism of the ridges, whose orientations are NW–SE, is advantageous for defence. There are, however, many passes that make for transportation corridors between Eastern Operational Level Zone and Western Operational Level Zone. The passes are of various lengths, widths, altitudes and communications characteristics, thus their different transportation (and therefore manoeuvre) capacities. There are, as well, many valleys (depressions) where military formations could be concentrated/deployed (capacities from 2 BDE to 2 Div).

⁴ Retrieved on 24th October 2019, from the Internet address: <https://www.ezilon.com/maps/images/europe/physical-map-of-Romania.gif>

⁵ Retrieved on 24th October 2019, from the Internet address: <http://www.geotutorials.ro/atlas-geografic/harti-romania/atlas-geografic-1980/>

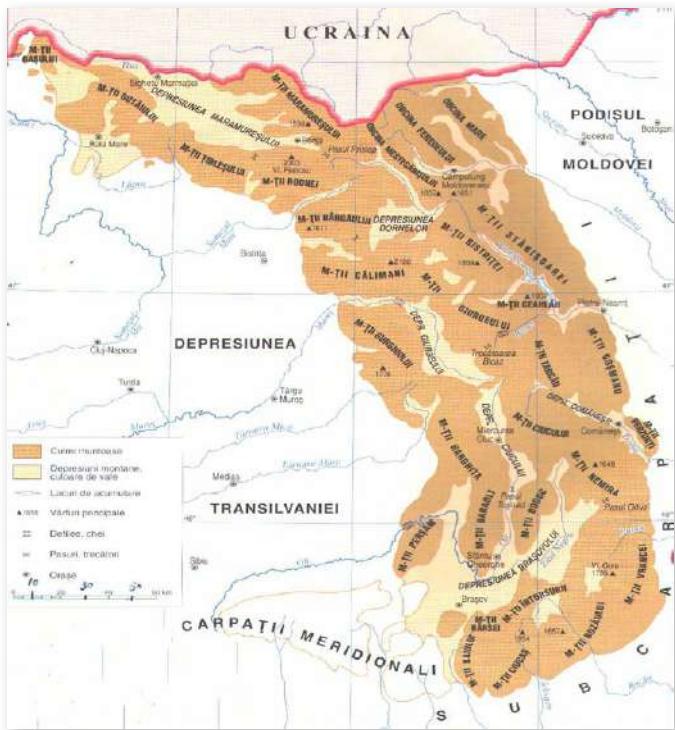


Fig. 5 the most important geographical features of the Oriental Carpathians⁶

A Bit of History

Always important in Romanian military thinking, the impetus to have the Focșani Gate fortified with permanent military engineering works came as a result of Russia's breach of the terms of the Treaty it signed with Romania in 1877. Romania was a country allied with Russia in the Russia – Turkish War of 1877-1878, and the text of the Treaty spoke about Russia's assurances regarding, among other things, the integrity of Romania's territory. Notwithstanding, at San Stefano, firstly, then at the Berlin Peace Congress, Russia used its might, its influence and the European states' "Realpolitik" fashion of doing foreign policy and rapped from Romania adding to Russian territory three Romanian Counties. That did not happen without Romania's vocal protests and parading of ideas of military opposition to the Russia's objective. As a result, the two countries came very close to exchanging military blows.

The lesson was that Russia could not be trusted, even when it promises something, and that the Russian political schemes and objectives regarding Romania were deadly threats for the Romanian state. The solution to this strategic paradigm was to find and ally powerful and willing enough to level the ground and, concomitantly, to increase the national defensive capability of the country. Thus, amongst other measures, the Defence Treaty with Austria – Hungary from 1883.

At the national level, the thinking was that Romania's geographical and political situation claimed for defensive engineering works to be undertaken where the natural terrain was not deemed to buttress enough the defence. In 1882 the Romanian Government was receiving a study regarding the engineering works necessary. The study specified five objectives to be reinforced. Along with Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați area (the most famous line inside the Focșani Gate), the other sites were the Bucharest Fortress, two bridgeheads in Mărăști area and Cernavodă area respectively, and defence works around Galați and Constanța.

The initial plan for the reinforcement of the Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați alignment belonged to Major Maximilian Schuman from the Prussian Army. The Schuman's initial blueprint was completed by the contribution of Romanian staff officers and in 1887 the Ministry of War approved the plan. The work began in 1888 and was finalised in 1893, the money spent occupying a vast swathe of the military budget. The plan called for the existence of 676 artillery guns arranged in 3 "fortified areas" (Focșani, Nămoloasa and Galați), with guns arrayed three lines deep. The artillery slated to be used represented almost half of total of Romanian artillery (1.452 pieces when the war began). 7000 specialized fortification troops were to permanently man the fortifications.

In a sort of operational paraphrase of the Moltke the Elder's say that no plan survives the shock of reality, the first operational use of the Focșani Gate was during the First World War, in 1916, but facing the south threat and not the north and the east threats as originally intended. That was the situation because Romania had joined the *Entente* in 1916 after two years of armed neutrality. In accordance

⁶ Retrieved on 24th October 2019, from the Internet address http://geomap.3x.ro/carpatii_orientali.html

with the Romanian Army's 1916 strategic plan (based on the "Z Hypothesis"), the declaration of war was concomitant with an offensive in Transylvania, with defence adopted along the Danube River and in Dobrogea.

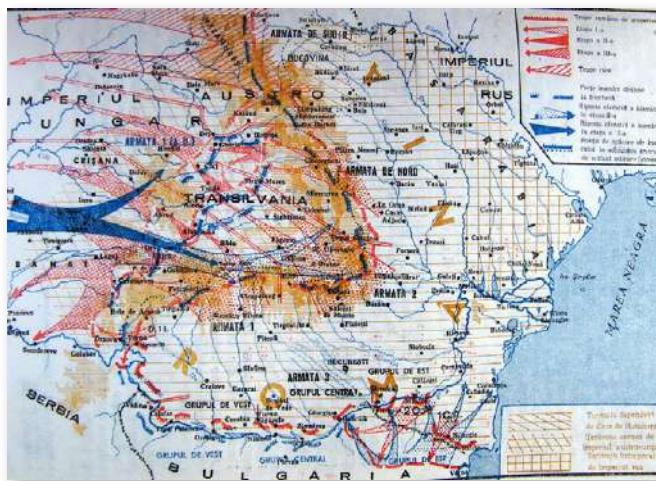


Fig. 6 Romanian Army Campaign Plan for 1916 ("Z" Hypothesis)⁷

Unfortunately, relatively soon, events unfolded negatively for the Romanian Army and it had to start withdrawing, its forced retreat coming to an end in the *Focșani Gate* where the Romanian Army allied with Russian Forces stopped the advancing forces of the Central Powers, in 1916.

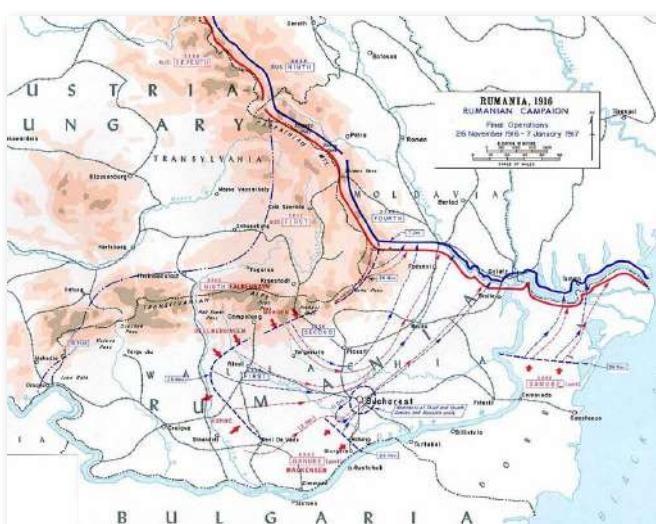


Fig. 7 the Central Powers military forces advance towards the Focșani Gate in 1916.⁸

The next year, Romanian Army, with the support of the Russian forces, defeated the German and Austria-Hungary forces in the famous defensive battles of Mărășești (inside the *Focșani Gate*) and Oituz (inside the Oriental Carpathians) denying the Central Powers' intention to occupy the rest of the Romanian territory. 1917 was, as well, the year that saw the *Gate* being used as the operational base of the successful offensive actions of Romanian Army (Mărăști Offensive Operation).

The *Focșani Gate* received a special attention during the Second World War. In Romania the year 1940 equates with *Annus Horribilis*. That year Romania was subjected to a Soviet ultimatum to annex Romanian land, the German – Italian Diktat in support of Hungary's territorial claims and the Bulgarian land reclamation. The overall loss amounted to almost one third of Romania's territory. Alone and isolated, with traditional allies (France and UK) either defeated or fighting for survival, Romania had to choose to ally herself with the only European military power of the era that was capable and promised to guarantee whatever had remained after all those losses, namely Germany. Consequently, on 22nd June 1941, Romania joined *Barbarossa* with the aim of retaking the territories she had lost the previous year to the Soviet Union.

In 1944 the Soviet forces were reaching the northern and eastern part of Romanian territory in their advance towards Western Europe. To the Romanian leadership it was clear that the German and Romanian forces were not powerful enough to stop the Soviet military's roll steamer without using very strong terrain features that would have alleviated the numerical advantage the Soviets had. The German overall aim called for time to be gained in order, among other things, for the new weapons to be massively built, used and gained advantage from. Evidently, Romania's objective was the defence of the national territory. So, time was of the essence and the Carpathians, and the *Focșani Gate*, were seen as fundamental in gaining that time and in attrite the Soviet forces.

⁷ Retrieved on 24th October 2019, from the Internet address: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/7c/Planul_de_campa-nie_rom%C3%A2n_din_1916.png/1200px-Planul_de_campanie_rom%C3%A2n_din_1916.png

⁸ Retrieved on 24th October 2019, from the Internet address: <http://www.roconsulboston.com/Media/Maps/Romania-WW1-3lg.jpg>



Fig. 8 the Red Army's Operational Plan for the period 20 August to 25 October 1944⁹.

The main thrust through the Focșani Gate

The concept of the German-Romanian High Command was to employ mobile defence in the Iași area and to block the passing of Soviet forces over the mountains in Transylvania, to lead these forces in the *Focșani Gate* where they would have been stopped and destroyed by the very strong defence organized there, in order to gain time and produce attrition to the Soviet forces. For that to happen ample measures were taken in order to make the *Focșani Gate* impenetrable.

Romania's joining of the Allied camp, in August 1944, relegated those plans to the shelves of history without them being put to the trials of reality. After switching the side, the Romanian Army stopped opposing the Soviet Army, regrouped and ensured the Soviets marched unhindered through the *Focșani Gate* towards Bucharest, the rest of Romania, Western Europe and south of the Danube.

Aside from whatever the plans were then, with the advantage of hindsight, our days military specialists and historians have calculated that if Romania had not left the alliance with Germany the defence alignment that would have been established on the Carpathian ridges and in the Focșani Gate would have delayed the Soviet advance towards Western Europe with, at least, six months.

The lesson is that then, as today, *Focșani Gate* is an area that opens the route to Western and Southern Europe, a zone of fundamental operational importance and therefore it must receive maximum attention possible.

Geographic information regarding the Gate

Conventionally, the *Gate's* width is considered to be 80-85 Km and its depth is around 60 km (Ianca-Nămoloasa-Cudalbi direction). As the same convention goes, the spatial limits of the *Gate* are as follows: to the West: a line connecting Râmnicu Sărat – Obobești – Panciu; to the East: a line linking Tichilești (15 km South of Brăila) – Brăila – Galați – Foltești (25 km North of Galați), inferior flow of Prut River- the Danube between Galați and Tichilești; to the South: a line connecting Râmnicu Sărat – Sutești – Tichilești; to the North: a line linking: Panciu – Tecuci – Foltești.

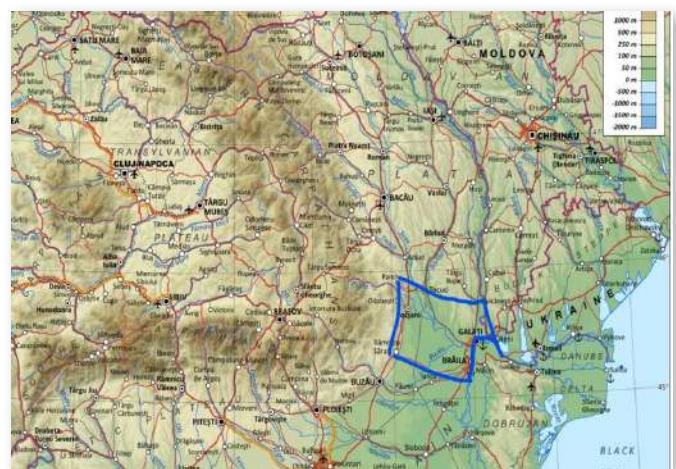


Fig. 9 a general schematic of the Focșani Gate

Source: http://wikipedia.org/geography_of_Romania

From the administrative point of view, the *Gate* dwells on the territory of four counties (Romania's total is 41 to which the Municipality of Bucharest must be added), namely Vrancea, Galați, Brăila, Buzău. This organization has military implications due to the laws related to defence and security that bestow responsibilities to be discharged, during crises and war, to various governmental bodies and people in administration. As well, the capitals of the counties cluster various technical means (mainly telecommunication and information gear and HQs facilities, but not only) that could be used during stress. Not to be left aside is the fact that the capitals are, at the same time, points that are orienting and clustering road and rail communications.

⁹ Retrieved on 24th October 2019, from the Internet address: <https://razboiulpentruțrecut.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/rumin.jpg?w=812>

The land communication is well developed with four railroads and two modernized roads (part of the European network) traversing north to south (and vice versa, of course).

The most important railroads are:

- Râmnicu Sărat - Focșani - Mărășești (direction Suceava - double track);
- Făurei - Tecuci;
- Brăila - Galați - Tecuci;
- Galați - Stoicanî - Târgu Bujor - Bârlad.
- The modernised roadways part of the European Network are:
- Râmnicu Sărat - Focșani - Mărășești;
- Brăila - Galați - Tecuci (with 2 branches Măicănești - Hanu Conachi and Măicănești to Râmnicu Sărat).

From west to east (and vice versa) the most important land communications are:

- Railroad:
- Marășești-Tecuci (direction Iași).
- Roadways:
- Marășești-Tecuci;
- Odobești-Focșani-Măicănești;
- Râmnicu Sărat-Sutești-Brăila.

A net of national and local roads, with different capacities and of different qualities should be added to the European type ones. The former link the counties' capitals with every locality (towns and villages) in their counties.

It should be noted that almost all railroad stations (no matter how small) have ramps for on and off loading.

From the hydrographic perspectives, the rivers are presenting reduced bodies of water and therefore they are not important obstacle in terms of the water to be negotiated.

In term of floating means, the Danube, Siret and Prut rivers could be used for water transportation. The water volume permits the Danube to be used all year round (if not frozen during winter times). For the other two rivers, in the best cases, the capacity is smaller craft. In their cases the water volumes should be verified in order to ascertain the possibilities.

There are bridges of various sizes that are linking the banks of the rivers. The Danube presents a ferry crossing at Brăila by with the passing to the South-Eastern Operational Level Zone (the Romanian region called Dobrogea) could be executed. The peace time capacity for a vessel is 300 tones and the time needed for onloading, traversing and offloading is approx. 30 minutes. In time of need military crossing equipment could be added to the peace time ones.

Airstrips, tarmac or clay, suitable for fixed wing aircraft are available, as well.

The influence upon military operation

From the military operational perspective, the *Gate*, as it is laid between the Southern part of the Oriental Carpathians and the Danube, is one of the most important pieces of terrain in Romania. Through the operational and strategic perspectives it opens, it could be concluded that the *Gate* is one of the most important in Europe for NATO.

Looking inside the Eastern Operational Level Zone, in the direction north to south, through the analytical lenses provided by the military geography, it's evident that the *Gate* clusters two Operational Level Directions (Siret Valley Direction that comes from the Northern part of the Romanian region called Moldova and the Bugeag Direction that runs down from Odessa along the Black Sea shore) into one strategic level direction (Strategic Direction East) that runs towards Bucharest with an operational branch to Constanța.

Once beyond the *Gate*, the very flat Romanian plain, that starts at the southern edge of the *Gate* and borders the Danube River, is opening a Strategic Direction towards the heart of Central Europe following the Danube River valley. From this Central European Direction, a South Western European Strategic Direction is born out, whose

aim is reaching the Italian northern plains (from which the south of the Italian peninsula could be reached). This new Direction follows, further on, the southern contours of the European Continent towards the southern part of France and after that, Spain and Portugal. The very vicinity of the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas must be seen as greatly influencing the character of operations.

At the same time, the Romanian plain is opening a South Eastern European Strategic Direction that cuts through Bulgaria towards the Greek peninsula, with another strategic arrow pointing towards the Bosphorus and Dardanelle Straits, continuing further on towards the eastern and southern parts of the Turkish Anatolia.

In a kind of overall conclusion, a military force once has got through the *Focşani Gate* enjoys strategic avenue of approaches to reach the Central, the Southern and the Southern eastern parts Europe.

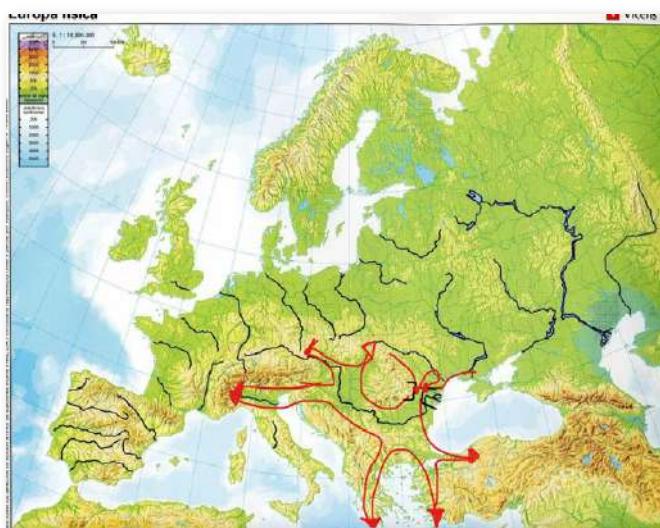


Fig. 10 the schematic of strategic and operational avenues of approaches on the south-eastern and southern part of the European Continent that are open once the Focşani Gate is cleared.¹⁰

To be clear, this is not just theoretical military geography, but what the former Warsaw Pact Treaty offensive plans specified.

The terrain inside the *Gate* is rather unexceptional, presenting normal geographical features and therefore, in general, not hindering military manoeuvres. The *Gate's* composition sees a diversity

of geographical features with the observation that the low altitude ones, namely plains and river valleys, are predominant.

The *Gate's* *must-go-through* character is given by the very strong terrain features (militarily speaking) that are bordering it to the East (Danube and Prut Rivers) and to the West (a string of localities and the Carpathians Mountains).

The Northern and Southern limits of the *Gate* do not enjoy the same strong characteristics as the *Gate's* shoulders. There are elevations, natural coverage and localities on which defensive lines could be organized but, by themselves, they are rather modest, not posing insurmountable problems to modern, mechanised, armoured and airborne forces.

The lowest elevation zones inside the *Gate* are the Central and the Eastern ones (corresponding to the lower Siret Valley). East to Siret River is the Covurlui Plateau. West of Siret River there is a sizeable plain area that ends at the towns and villages in the Sub Carpathian Hills. South of Siret the space is almost totally open and flat, the Galaţi – Brăila area being amongst the lowest in elevation in the country. This part of the *Gate*, a depression, is totally accessible to military operations; it is a fully *Go Area*. On the other hand, it offers scarce possibilities of protection, concealment and sheltering of troops.

Generally speaking, aside from the Danube and Siret Rivers (the Siret River constitutes an important obstacle between Mărăşeşti and its flowing into the Daube) all other water flows are unimpressive in term of the size of bodies of water to be negotiated for a bridgehead operation. On the other hand, there are steep riverbanks and muddy riverbeds that could be used as important anti-armour counter mobility obstacles. Buzau River is compartmentalising the area in two zones with the Western part of a greater value as anti-armour obstacle (banks and bed). Of great importance are the bridges over Siret River. As well, much attention has to be given to the areas where river crossings can be conducted. The *Gate* is not free of the presence of some lakes and muddy areas and their intrinsic operational value as military obstacles could be enhanced by military engineering works.

¹⁰ Retrieved on 25th October 2019, from the Internet address: <https://ro.pinterest.com/pin/108016091036897962/?lp=true>

Inevitably, the land communication system (railroads and roadways), that are determinant for the mobility corridors and avenue of approaches, will greatly influence the manoeuvre of all forces. Great care should be given to the road and rail capacities in term of quantities of troops and freight possible to be hauled. The physical resistance of the bridges has to be in attention (tons per axle. Modernized: 10t single and 16t double; national and local: 7,5t single; 12t double).

The Focșani Gate: Front Door To The Balkans And Back Door To Western Europe

Overview:

The *Focșani Gate* is the third in the series of Full Spectrum Deterrence Table-Top Exercises conducted in Romania as a partnership between the Romanian Defense Staff, Romania's New Strategy Center (NSC) and the US-based Centre for the Study of New Generation Warfare (NGW Centre). This Full Spectrum Joint Deterrence simulation was conducted 22-26 September 2019 at the Romanian Land Force Academy in Sibiu. All Full Spectrum Deterrence simulations in Romania included both Romanian Strategic/Inter-Institutional and Joint/Operational level simulation events. While each simulation included traditional kinetic war gaming, by addressing all elements of New Generation Warfare (NGW), Romania was able to explore the full range of non-kinetic actions, including the many hybrid warfare activities being observed and employed today. These simulations were conducted as a series of scenario driven events that began well before the start of an armed conflict. The unclassified vignettes confirmed the importance of engagement from Romania's "Whole of Government" approach in any potential conflict, not just during pre-kinetic phases, but throughout all kinetic phases to conflict termination. In addition to the active participation from Romanian

Defence Staff and Inter-Institutional organizations, players were also engaged from both US and NATO organizations.

The Simulation exercises are considered to be an experiential learning process that also included a number of substantial topical briefs to expand the knowledge of the participants. The players were typically broken into teams to represent the Romanian Strategic, Joint Staff and Component Commands; the Romanian Inter-Institutional structures; as well as International/Allied elements. The simulation was directed by an EXCON team facilitated by NGW Centre staff. A computer-based simulation tool run by the NGW Centre, was employed to track the movement of forces and to perform attrition calculations when Blue and Red forces were kinetically engaged. A dedicated Intranet was provided to allow the simulation teams to communicate as they would be expected to do in a crisis (this also assisted in collecting data during the simulation for subsequent assessment back in the NGW Centre laboratory). The outcome of each "move" (i.e., decision) was intended to provide insights and observations reflecting the potential demands and consequences from actual conflict (whether kinetic or not) and to assist participants better define the questions or identify challenges and problems that might have previously been unrecognized. The simulation was conducted as a "floor game" (i.e., with a giant terrain map on the floor in the centre of the simulation area at the Romanian Land Force Academy in Sibiu).

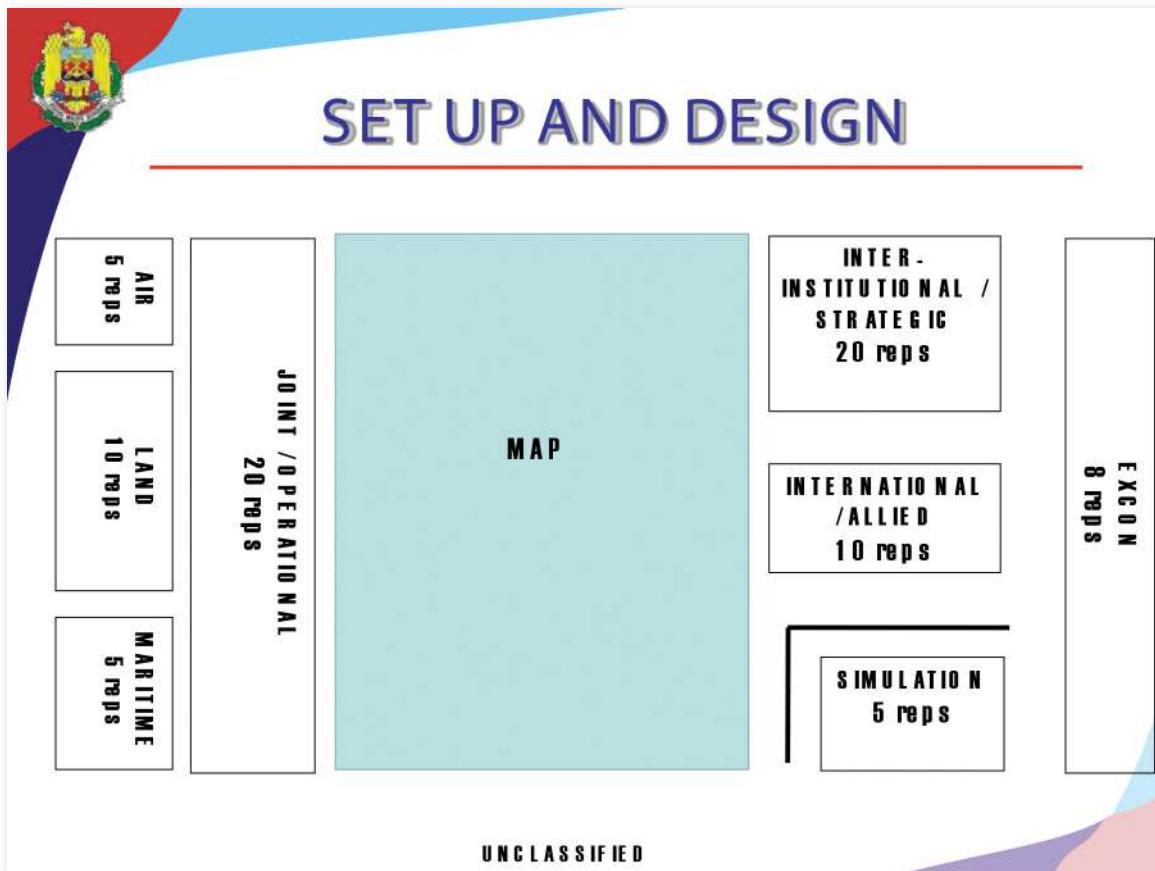


Fig. 11. Simulation layout

Objectives:

Romania's aim was to exercise, through a simulated operational-strategic environment, decision-making mechanisms at all levels of government. This led to four objectives: 1) exercise of the Romanian government's inter-institutional decision-making mechanisms based on the various scenario vignettes; 2) exercise the joint/operational decision making mechanisms with different configurations of capability; 3) identify questions and challenges in the decision-making processes; and, 4) train and identify requirements for the development of Romanian joint operational culture and whole of government response to operational-strategic threats to the country and Allied states which it is legally obligated to support. Each of the three simulations conducted in Romania initially examined the current combat capabilities possessed by Romania (which are widely understood to be in need of modernizing). Then the exercise would be

repeated with a range of new capabilities, either actively in the procurement process or being considered as part of Romania's effort to meet the NATO commitment to invest 2% of GDP into Defence. These modernized capabilities would provide improvements to Romanian maritime, aviation, land, and special operations forces, as well as in some cases improved interoperability with Allied partners. In some cases, Allied government capabilities were included from the beginning and, in others, added as reinforcing elements later in the conflict.

Background:

Romanian Defence Staff organized a series of three simulations examining all 9 elements of Russian New Generation Warfare, including non-

kinetic and kinetic forms of warfare as identified in Russian military literature (hence, the title of “Full Spectrum Deterrence Joint Simulation” for the simulations). The first simulation provided a “familiarization” of operational-strategic planning for military officers and government civilians. The second simulation further engaged the Romanian Navy in an integrated planning process for defence of the country. Finally, the third simulation examined whether to historical importance of the so-called “Focșani Gate” continued to be relevant for Romania in the 21st Century?

The two historically, but contemporarily relevant Operational Directions for potential attack on Romania are from the Northeast and East (see *Figure 12*). These two approaches were considered in varying degrees by the three simulation exercises with the northern approach passing through the Focșani Gate.



Figure 12: Potential Operational Directions against Romania from the North and East.

The Focșani Gate Simulation at Romania's Land Forces Academy:

The Romanian Land Forces Academy Simulation in Sibiu consisted of 3 Vignettes played with current and modernized Romanian forces. Vignette 1, focused on a developing military-political crisis, mostly involving Red kinetic operations against a neighbouring state allowing for the possibility of

Romanian political and military decision-makers to argue for conflicting responses. Vignette 2, focused on “non-kinetic” actions directed against Romania in the context of “kinetic” actions against Allied states, emphasized the “politically difficult” decisions with which Romanian security officials would be confronting Romanian political figures. The last vignette was mostly kinetic – focused on the Focșani Gate – and providing Romanian operational planners the opportunity of examining the potential of a modernized Romanian military for destroying numerically superior forces on the very terrain that offered the Red aggressor its incentive for attacking.

Simulation Observations

Mobile defense can be successful but must be capable of dispersing rapid concentrations of combat capability. Modern attack helicopters were critical to achieve this objective. Similarly, multi-role modern aircraft provided key capabilities during the course of the armed conflict. Early on their role was key in rolling back air defenses and once air and electronic warfare defenses were reduced in their effectiveness; aircraft could focus on the support of ground forces both in defense of, and attack. Due to Red’s missile attack capability early in the conflict it is required that air bases be hardened. This should include hardening aircraft shelters, establishing multiple launch and recovery surfaces (included widened taxiways) and deployment of runway damage recovery capabilities. Romania should also look to establish plans to will allow for further dispersal of aircraft along with fuel and support/repair equipment. Attack helicopters with large payloads and high survivability becomes a key offensive element early in the conflict to help attrite air defense and electronic warfare capability in advance of force on force conflict and then, the critical anti-armor capability when Red forces are directly engaged. Improved air and ballistic missile defence capabilities provide improved point and area defense but its effectiveness is dependent on placement. Finally, advanced tactical UAVs are key to improved surveillance and reconnaissance.

Timely political decision making was shown to be very important to ensure trained and ready Romanian forces are mobilized and deployed. More work is needed to determine the timelines by which NATO reinforcements can reach Romania as well as ensuring the transportation infrastructure is available to facilitate. It is essential to recognize hybrid threats as integral to Red achieving its objective and take aggressive collective actions against all identifiable internal threats. It is well recognized that fully integrating Romania's Inter-Institutions will be a key to deterrence.

General Assessment of Results of the Simulation

The results of the first day of Red operations clearly indicated that current Romanian forces, in spite of their determination and courage, will probably not be able to wrestle away the initial initiative from the enemy on both the Moldovan and the Coastal Operational Directions. The Romanian Navy and Coastal Batteries proved to be thoroughly behind what would make them operationally relevant in terms of their performance and will greatly benefit from the planned acquisition to upgrade their missiles and radars. The Romanian Air Force proved incapable of "beating-off" the Red's Aerospace Operations sufficiently to make itself a factor in the land battle during the first day of fighting. Red Artillery (such as MRLS and tube) was of such range and capacity as to be able to deal Romanian land forces series of blows without suffering counter-battery fire sufficient to make Red forces change firing positions. For the most part, Red forces met their planning norms regarding depth of penetration of the enemy's defences for the first day of the offensive.

While the shortage of exercise time did not allow for "playing" the immediate subsequent days of the Red offensive operation, computer runs back in the NGW Centre lab indicated that the Romanian forces would have been unlikely to re-establish defensive stability. Having successfully established a logistic supply line from the coast over the bridge at Giurgeni to the Red forces holding the Focșani Gate, the Red forces paused to refuel and rearm.

To maximize real game time, scenario "play" was moved ahead 48 hours, and the Romanian forces were provided modernized helicopter and MLRS, as well as interoperable reinforced capabilities from Allied Forces.

Focșani Gate: From Passageway to Killing Zone

When the scenario "skipped ahead" to a fully modernized Romanian Army – including latest generation of Multiple Rocket Launchers and Attack Helicopters – the Focșani Gate became something completely unanticipated in the Red operational plan. Romanian experts saw the 150 kilometer-long "funnel" shaped by the Siret River in the north, the Buzau River in the West, the Danube River in the East, and the Ialomita River in the South as a trap with little place to hide from modern attack helicopter counter-attack and, due to the river barriers on all four sides, little chance of escape. Romania "slammed" the gate shut by turning it into a tank "killing zone." Modernized Romanian Advanced Artillery and Attack Helicopters were extremely effective against Red tanks and artillery, and within 24 hours gained the upper hand, assuming that a few elements of key Allied reinforcement could reach the conflict in time.

What this final "move" in the Sibiu Simulation suggests is that – with appropriate modernization – combat losses could potentially be dramatically shifted from one side of the ledger to the other if the Romanian Army had modern capability for fire power mobility and deep strike.

Conclusion

Geographically speaking, Romania is a European country, laying on the South eastern part of the continent. Romania is, at the same time, part of the Black Sea Region, thus neighbouring herself with states outside Europe.

From the geopolitical perspectives, Romania is a NATO nation and an EU member border country, and this political geography is making her part of the most powerful military organisation on Earth. At the same time, these memberships are making her the target of a first offensive shocks (military or otherwise) were an aggression to emerge from the East.

As well, these memberships are transforming Romania from just a purely national box into a conduit, in the sense that everything that may happen in Romania or with Romania or to Romania is not anymore limited to Romania proper only, the effects reverberating, wholly affecting the two already mentioned organisations Romania is a part of.

Of course, the aspects above are normal consequences for a country being part of international organisations such as NATO and the EU. In reality, after the fall of the Soviet Union until around the middle of the 2000s, there were not many people stepping out of the theoretical approach, realising that along with the benefits are coming responsibilities and, as has to be said, dangers. There were not many who were realistically contemplating the practical possibilities and/or opportunities for NATO's and the EU's defence guarantees to apply.

But, the years of 2007, 2008, 2014 came and with them many blunt iterations of the fact that Russia decided it did not care about international rules and its signature on international agreements, attacking (the latter two times kinetically) sovereign states, taking away territories and annexing them. By these actions, Russia has demonstrated it has the will and the force and the knowledge to do this. By its deeds Russia said firmly it was not a peaceful country but an aggressor. Thus, the political reality hit hard and unexpectedly and dreams of a new perpetual peace, due to the end of history, had to be discarded.

Looking at the map, the unavoidable conclusion is that the Black Sea area is the spot where Russia decided to break the peace, as the 2008 and 2014 aggressions were perpetrated here, adding, that way, to the already existing "frozen conflicts" (Transnistria, Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia) Russia produced or fomented here.

In 2015 Russian involvement in Syria came to the fore and another aspect became clear, meaning that the military capabilities Russia are honing in the Black Sea region are not only for the region per se, they being used in other parts of the world. Hence, the Black Sea has acquired a new meaning for Russia (and implicitly for all states that are affected and therefore concerned), that of a trampoline, of a projection platform from where military means could be hurled at other parts of the world.

Not to be forgotten in the least, Russia is arming itself beyond the what would its normal needs be calling for, striving to achieve total dominance within the Black Sea basin and beyond it.

In fact, the Russian military potential is often used as an instrument to facilitate the achievement of foreign policy objectives and to signal the West that Moscow has interests in its neighbourhood, but also in other areas, that must be respected.

Consequently, Russia has continuously deployed close to its western regions, Black Sea region included, a combination of offensive and defensive capabilities, dual capable, which extend from Murmansk to the Eastern Mediterranean, creating what the West calls the Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD) Environments. Moreover, the A2AD environment established in the Black Sea region is the most capable, compared with others, and it can drastically deter, disrupt and deny an unwanted (by Russia) Allied response in support of a riparian NATO member state targeted by Russia.

Russia, by what it has been going, by the ways it has been doing it, it has been breathing oxygen to the establishment of a policy of mistrust, of force in the Black Sea area.

Based on what NATO stands for, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation had no choice but to go back to the issues of deterrence and posture.

Preparedness, in the most comprehensive understanding of the term, is of paramount importance for the Deterrence to work. At the core of the Deterrence lays the Defence posture which, in the broadest sense, is defined by the aggregate military capabilities and the will to use them if necessary.

There are many domains to be looked at and functions to have the upper hand within, but probably the most important task, because it starts everything and it is influencing everything, is the need to win the conceptual/intellectual and the decision-making contests.

The conceptual/intellectual aspect is about calibrating your *modus operandi* on who you are, what your objectives are, what do you have in your inventory, where you are fighting, against whom etc.

Implicitly, to win in the conceptual/intellectual contest is to fully understand the multidomain character you are operating in, with the land space being a fundamental part of it. In the simplest terms, it is necessary to completely understand, among other fundamental things, the terrain and its importance.

While the Carpathians most certainly remain the most dominate geography in contemporary Romania, it can be argued the *Focșani Gate* is the one of most critical piece of military operational terrain in Romania. It serves as a funnel from the north and creates a tank friendly battlefield. However, under the "right" circumstances, it can also become an operational trap offering little possibility for escape.

It is equally important to understand that the *Focșani Gate* can swing both ways: It can swing in from the north and allow opposing forces easy access – not only to Bucharest – but it could become an easy gateway to the Balkan States and beyond. Equally, it can also swing the other way - providing a path from the south heading northward into Central Europe.

Thus, given the current military-political balance in central Europe, both the *Suwalki Corridor* and the *Focșani Gate*, are critical "Centers of Gravity" for the military strategic stability of Europe.

The *Fulda Gap* was clearly a potential "choke" point at the tactical-scale, but also a potential "bait" with which to trap NATO forces in an operational-scale encirclement.

The *Suwalki Corridor*, whose operational implication is to deal with the vulnerability of the almost 1,000 kilometre land line of communications between Warsaw and Tallinn, can be closed with artillery fire that could just as easily destroy any ground forces attempt to defend it by occupying it.

The *Focșani Gate*, on the other hand, is a battlefield comprised of significant river barriers running north to south in its northern half, and west to east in its southern half; and all "squeezed" between the nearly impenetrable Carpathian Mountains and the longest navigable river in Central Europe – the Danube. Unlike the *Fulda Gap* and the *Suwalki Corridor*, the *Focșani Gate* is both too large to be closed with conventional weapons and large enough to invite manoeuvre warfare.

Thus, Bucharest should be seen – along with Warsaw – as one of two centres of gravity in the defence of contemporary Europe. As the northwest quadrant (between the Vistula and Bug Rivers) of Poland is the potential battlefield in Central Europe, the *Focșani Gate* is the potential battlefield for Southern Europe. The future of Europe could easily come to depend upon what transpires should either of these strategic regions become actual battlefields.

NATO must have a unitary approach on the entire Eastern Flank and assume a consistent and robust presence from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. The *Focșani Gate* is not about Bucharest and it is not just about Romania because Romania's territory is NATO's and EU's, like every other NATO or EU member state's territory is. A military force once it has passed through the *Focșani Gate* enjoys strategic avenue of approaches to reach the Central, the Southern and the Southern eastern part Europe. And that makes the *Focșani Gate* of fundamental importance for any NATO and EU member. How much awareness exists is another question, but whatever that level is, that does not mean the *Gate* is not fundamentally important.



New Strategy Center is a Romanian think tank specializing in foreign, defence and security policy, a non-partisan, non-governmental organization. New Strategy Center operates at three main levels: providing analytical inputs and expert advice to decisionmakers; holding regular debates, both in-house and public, on subjects of topical interest; expanding external outreach through partnerships with similar institutions or organizations in Europe and the US, joint policy papers and international conferences. The Balkans and the Black Sea space are priority areas of interest for New Strategy Center. The current activities of New Strategy Center also cover such subjects as domestic developments in Romania as relevant for national security, military modernization and defence procurement, energy security, cyber security and hybrid threats.



Since 2014, the Centre for the Study of New Generation Warfare has led efforts to educate Western democratic leadership on the strategy and tactics of New Generation Warfare (NGW) in use today. The foundation of this effort is the continuing research into evolving techniques of NGW begun by Moscow and now being adopted by other regimes and illiberal democracies. The Centre aims to help NATO, EU and partner nations defend against states (Russia, others) waging NGW — across the full spectrum of economic, political and military security. The Centre utilizes a wide range of educational tools; from briefings and speeches, to the publication of articles and books, to the employment of various forms of simulations and computer war games to distribute the facts of these NGW methods of military-political aggression.

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