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ROMANIA'S NATIONAL DAY

NATO AGENDA

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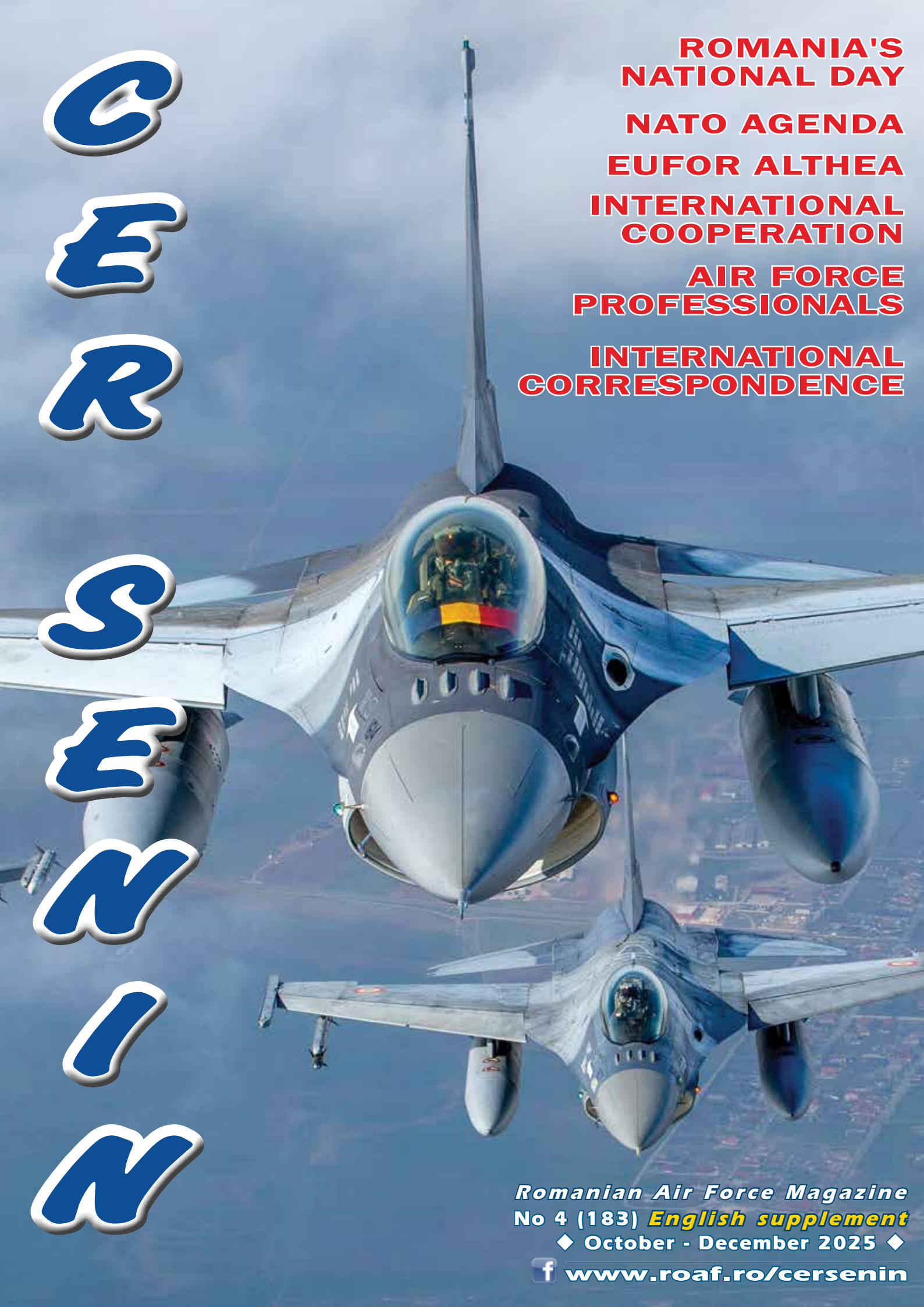
AIR FORCE PROFESSIONALS

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE



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Cover I: ***ROU AF F-16 Fighting Falcon***
Photo by adrian Sultănoiu

Cover III: ***IAR-330 helicopter***
Photo by Adrian Sultănoiu

Cover IV: ***IAR- 99 SM | Photo courtesy of Center for Research, Innovation, and Flight Testing***

TABLE OF CONTENTS

#WEARENATO


PAGE 6


PAGES 10 - 13


PAGES 14 - 15


PAGES 16 - 17

IMPORTANT NOTE:
The articles presented in the magazine are drawn from various sources.
If a particular source is not explicitly stated, the information is sourced from the Allied Air Command Public Affairs Office.


PAGE 5

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ROMANIA CELEBRATED NATIONAL DAY WITH MILITARY PARADE AND ALLIED PARTICIPATION

"Every year, on December 1, we reaffirm our commitment to the country and to the Romanians, whether we are in garrisons, on the training ground, at home with family or on missions far from the country. The uniform we wear requires rigor, character and the permanent availability to protect and support.
Wherever our soldiers are, the flag of Romania accompanies them. In theaters of operations, in military bases, in training ranges or at ceremonies, the tricolor flag remains more than a symbol: it is a reminder of the mission we have assumed and of the people we serve. The flag raised today reminds us that we are part of a history that we carry forward through what we do every day" stated General Gheorghiță Vlad, Chief of the Defense Staff

Romania's National Day, commemorated on December 1, honors the Great Union of 1918 and reaffirms the nation's enduring commitment to unity, dignity, and service. The day recognizes those who built the modern Romanian state and underscores the responsibility of citizens and institutions to defend and serve the country. The military parade at the Triumphal Arch in Bucharest brought together approximately 2,900 personnel from the Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Romanian Intelligence Service, Special Telecommunications Service, and National Penitentiary Administration, supported by 220 technical assets, including 60 on static display. The event highlighted the operational readiness and capabilities of Romania's defense and security forces.
Foreign troops marched alongside Romanian personnel, with 240 soldiers from France, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United States, and allied NATO contributors, demonstrating solidarity and a shared commitment within the Alliance.
The Romanian Air Force participated through training and formation detachments from the Air Force General Staff, 1st SAM Brigade, the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy, the "Traian Vuia" Military School of Warrant Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Air Force, and the "Mihai Viteazul" National Military College. Air defense capabilities were represented by the PATRIOT and HAWK systems. The aerial highlight was a helicopter flyover above the Triumphal Arch–the only aviation element able to operate in adverse weather on parade day–paying tribute to airmen who execute missions under all conditions.


Students from "Mihai Viteazul" National Military College


1st SAM Brigade detachment


Color Bearers from allied detachments present the colors during Romania's National Day parade


HAWK system at Triumphal Arch in Bucharest


PATRIOT system also in static display at Triumphal Arch

ROMANIA ADDED NEW F-16 SQUADRON TO SUPPORT NATO AIR POLICING MISSIONS

The 48th Fighter Squadron of the 71st Air Base in Câmpia Turzii, Romania began NATO-led Air Policing missions over Romanian airspace on 20 October 2025.

The missions aim to ensure the integrity of Romanian airspace, strengthen the defence of NATO's eastern flank and underline Romania's firm commitment to collective security.
The certification of the second F-16 Fighting Falcon squadron marks a significant milestone in Romania's growing contribution to the Alliance's integrated air defence system. It reflects the Romanian Air Force's high level of interoperability and its capability to operate modern defensive assets alongside other Allied Air Forces.
Currently, three fighter squadrons conduct NATO Air Policing missions from Romanian territory. Alongside the 53rd Fighter Squadron from Fetești and the 48th Fighter Squadron from Câmpia Turzii, a detachment from the German Air Force's Tactical Air Wing 71 "Richthofen" – operating five Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft – is carrying out Air Policing missions from Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base in Romania.
Romania's participation in the NATO Air Policing mission highlights the Alliance's defensive and cohesive posture along the Eastern Flank.

Story by ROU AF PAO

NATO REAFFIRMED ROMANIA'S MILITARY AIRWORTHINESS AUTHORITY ACCREDITATION

On 12 November 2025, during the Aviation Committee (AVC) meeting, the National Military Aeronautical Authority (AAMN) was formally presented a certificate revalidating its NATO accreditation as a competent military airworthiness authority.

The accreditation follows a comprehensive audit of the national military airworthiness framework. The audit assessed AAMN's systems for certifying and overseeing state aircraft, its processes for approving design, production, and maintenance organizations (including organizations that provide maintenance training), and its procedures for certifying technical personnel.
The revalidation confirms that Romania, through the AAMN, maintains a complete and robust system for military airworthiness regulation, certification, and oversight. It reinforces Allied confidence in the Romanian Air Force's ability to ensure a high level of aviation safety during multinational operations and strengthens Romania's role within the Alliance.

Story by ROU AF PAO

F-16 AIRCRAFT AT F-16 TRAINING CENTER OFFICIALLY TRANSFERRED TO ROMANIAN OWNERSHIP

An intergovernmental contract for the acquisition by Romania of 18 F-16 aircraft from the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was signed Monday, 3 November, at the Ministry of National Defense headquarters. The agreement was initialed by Brig. Gen. Ion-Cornel Pleșa, Head, General Directorate for Armaments, Ministry of National Defense (MApN), and Linda Ruseler, Director, Movable Property Domains, Ministry of Finance of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The signing took place in the presence of Minister of National Defense Liviu-Ionuț Moșteanu and H.E. Willemijn van Haaften, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Romania.

"I announced my interest in this acquisition in June at the conclusion of the NATO Summit in The Hague, when I signed the Memorandum of Understanding with my Dutch counterpart on extending the European F-16 Training Center (EFTC) in Romania," Minister Moșteanu said.
"By signing this contract, we mark the completion of a significant phase in the center's evolution and reaffirm Romania's commitment to providing a high-quality training environment. The EFTC has positioned Romania as a European hub for states that operate–or will operate–F-16 aircraft. We are also assessing expanded training modules as the fifth-generation multirole fighter aircraft program advances," the minister added.
The minister noted that the EFTC offers a unique, Europe-level capability for comprehensive F-16 pilot training and a framework in which instructors and students from multiple NATO nations train together to a common standard for allied defense.
"By sustaining the center's activities, Romania reaffirms its strategic role in the Alliance's defense architecture, confirms its international commitments, and actively contributes to strengthening deterrence and collective defense," he said. "Romania also reaffirms its support for Ukraine by offering the possibility of training Ukrainian pilots at the EFTC–contributing directly to regional security and Ukraine's sovereign right to defend itself."
Ambassador van Haaften highlighted the close security and defense cooperation between the Netherlands and Romania. "We are NATO partners working together to deter threats and enhance security on the Eastern Flank. Both the Netherlands and Romania are committed to supporting Ukraine. The European F-16 Training Center is a prime example of excellent cooperation–one I have seen firsthand during visits to Fetești Air Base," she said. The ambassador added that the handover of 18 F-16 aircraft from the Netherlands to Romania marks an important milestone in bilateral cooperation and will enable continued pilot training at the EFTC.
"I wish the pilots who will fly them clear skies and safe landings," she concluded.

CONTRACT AND FINANCIAL TERMS

Under the contract, the purchase price for the 18 F-16 aircraft is set at €1 (one euro), excluding VAT. VAT of €21 million will be payable, calculated on the declared value of the goods (aircraft and associated logistics support package), which is declared at €100 million.

OPERATIONAL USE AND COMMITMENTS

The contract represents a key step in the EFTC's development and signals the Ministry of National Defense's intent to maintain the facility for years to come, to meet training demand from Romanian, allied, and partner air forces amid limited international training capacity.
The F-16 aircraft currently located at Fetești will transfer into Romanian state ownership and are specifically intended for pilot training at the European F-16 Training Center. Romania will provide a number of training slots for pilots from NATO and partner nations as part of its obligations under the agreement.

Source: Romanian MoD Press Office

Photo courtesy of 86th Air Base

ROMANIAN F-16 TEAMS TRAINED AT THE TACTICAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME'S FINAL COURSE

The Romanian Air Force deployed three F-16s from the 86th Air Base to participate in the Tactical Leadership Programme's COMAO (Composite Air Operations) synthetic training course in Spain. The Tactical Leadership Programme's final flying course of the year, FC 2025-04, ran from Thursday, 6 November and concluded on Friday, 28 November. Over three weeks of concentrated training, roughly 550 personnel converged to rehearse complex air operations, graduate the course's last class of the year and validate multinational procedures under realistic combat conditions. Students completed the course syllabus, underscoring the program's focus on tactical-level leadership and the integration of all mission-essential specialties.

Training tempo and structure were driven by a deliberate progression from academics and simulator work to live sorties. The opening days were devoted to classroom instruction and MACE simulator missions, during which pilots and controllers rehearsed tactics, force flow and communications in a blended live-virtual environment. Live flying operations were scheduled in the afternoons from Monday through Friday beginning 17 November, enabling aircrews to apply classroom lessons and simulator scenarios directly to the tactical problems presented in real sorties.
Multinational participation provided breadth and realism to the training environment. Blue forces fielded a force package of some 20 combat aircraft contributed by allied partners: Eurofighter assets from Italy and Spain, AV-8 platforms from Spain, F-16s from Türkiye and Romania, German Tornados and French Mirage 2000D/2000-5 aircraft. Opposing-force elements consisted of nine aircraft and represented a credible adversary mix that included French Mirage variants, Spanish Eurofighter and F/A-18 platforms, and Turkish F-16s. The diversity of types and tactical doctrines present in the airspace forced planners and aircrews to refine coordination, identification and target-ing procedures under a full spectrum of contestability.
A layered support and threat environment increased operational fidelity. A NATO AWACS provided airborne command, control and air picture management while Air and Space Force C2 assets coordinated the mission flow. Persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability was available in the form of a Royal Air Force MQ-9 Predator B (NR-05), and a German electronic warfare aircraft augmented the electromagnetic battlespace. Simulated and live air-defense threats were fielded during the exercise: ground-based systems such as NASAMS, Skyguard and Mistral were used as realistic anti-aircraft targets, and the French ARPEGE threat simulation system was employed at multiple points in the operations area to emulate complex integrated air defenses.
Combat search and rescue and tactical mobility operations were an integral part of the syllabus. A Spanish NH-90 helicopter stood ready for CSAR tasks together with its extraction team, and tactical airlift requirements were met by an Italian C-27J and a Spanish C-295. A SAR helicopter from the national rescue service was also held on station from San Javier Air Base throughout the period of scheduled missions. These assets allowed planners to exercise recovery, extraction and tactical airlift drills within the same operational framework used by strike and suppression elements.
The MACE simulator continued to play a central role by linking virtual and live participants via datalinks such as Link-16. This blended training model enabled controllers and aircrews to practice high-risk scenarios at scale without exposing platforms to unnecessary risk, while preserving the cognitive load, timing and procedural discipline that only real-time, networked operations generate. As a result, the course validated not only individual tactics but also the interoperability of communications, identification and battle management protocols across national systems.
FC 2025-04 closed the year's training cycle with tangible gains in readiness and interoperability. By confronting multinational aircrews with live-fired air-defense simulations, electronic warfare exposure, integrated CSAR and transport missions, the course sharpened decision cycles and reinforced common operating procedures. The presence of a full complement of supporting systems – AWACS, unmanned ISR, EW platforms and tactical lift – made the training representative of coalition contingencies where combined arms synchronization is decisive.
From an operational perspective, the course delivered measurable value: graduating officers and aircrew left with enhanced tactical judgment, improved cross-service coordination skills and validated procedures for operating in contested environments. For participating nations, the exercise served as a practical assessment of equipment interoperability and of doctrine harmonization under stress. For the collective force, the combined effect is a small but meaningful increase in shared competence that contributes to deterrence by improving the predictability, tempo and resilience of allied air operations.

Story based on TLP Press Office www.tlp-info.org

AIR CHIEFS DISCUSSED 'ACCELERATING AIR AND MISSILE DEFENCE FOR 360-DEGREE SECURITY' DURING NACS 25-II

RAMSTEIN, Germany – On October 8 and 9, 2025, Allied and Partner Air Chiefs came together at Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) for the bi-annual NATO Air Chiefs' Symposium (NACS) 25-II.

The symposium, hosted by acting AIRCOM commander, Air Marshal Sir Johnny Stringer, was attended by Air Chiefs and representatives of 29 Allied Nations along with Partners Australia, Austria, Ireland, Japan and Switzerland. The symposium is a unique forum, facilitating collaboration, information sharing and discussion on combined opportunities.

This gathering is an opportunity to not only exchange ideas, but to strengthen the relationships that advance our collective security

"This gathering is an opportunity to not only exchange ideas, but to strengthen the relationships that advance our collective security", said Stringer. "The Allied and Partner representation signals a shared commitment to Air and Space power related to the all-encompassing theme of this symposium: Accelerating Air and Missile Defence for 360-degree security," he added.

The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Alexus G. Grynkewich, was connected to the symposium via VTC and shared his vision and priorities with NATO's Air and Space community.

Following on from previous NACS, topics under the theme for NACS 25-II enable senior representative to discuss matters relating to enhanced Air Command and Control (Air C2), enhanced Vigilance Activity (eVA) Eastern Sentry (EASN) and Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD).

NACS 25-11 will be the last iteration hosted by Air Marshal Sir Stringer as his time at AIRCOM draws to a close, Lieutenant General Guillaume Thomas of the French Air and Space Force will assume the role as deputy commander on October 30, 2025. During a break in the symposium the Air Chiefs were provided an opportunity to view a flyover by a Dutch Spitfire – a poignant moment to reflect on Allied aviation.

The NACs is hosted semi-annually by AIRCOM as a vehicle to exchange views and experiences in the Joint and Air domain. It also provides an opportunity to compare and discuss cooperation, coordination and development of NATO Air and Space Power.

SACEUR EMPHASISED WARFIGHTING READINESS DURING VISIT TO ALLIED AIR COMMAND

Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) U.S. Air Force General Alexus G. Grynkewich visited NATO's Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) headquarters at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, on 26 November 2025. Photo by OR-9 Fanny Chesiere

Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) U.S. Air Force General Alexus G. Grynkewich visited NATO's Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) headquarters at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, on 26 November 2025, reinforcing his strategic priorities of readiness, innovation and care for personnel across Allied Command Operations (ACO).

Meeting with newly appointed AIRCOM Commander, U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Jason T. Hinds, General Grynkewich discussed the evolving security landscape and the need to maintain a warfighting mindset at every level of command. He received operational updates on Eastern Sentry, NATO's newest enhanced Vigilance Activity (eVA), which strengthens air and missile defence across the eastern flank.

Eastern Sentry represents a structural evolution from traditional Air Policing into a more agile, multi-domain defensive framework that integrates air, land, maritime and space capabilities.

Immersing himself in AIRCOM's mission, General Grynkewich toured the headquarters of AIRCOM, observing how Allied forces integrate air, space, cyber and intelligence functions to deter and defend every inch of NATO territory.

"The most important thing we do each and every day is to deter and defend every square inch of Alliance territory," he said. "That requires relentless focus on warfighting readiness."

Reflecting his stated priorities for ACO – i.e. taking care of people, fostering a warfighting mindset and harnessing innovation – General Grynkewich reinforced these embodying priorities directly with AIRCOM's personnel.

After several operational updates and briefs, SACEUR signed AIRCOM's guest book for the first time, symbolizing General Grynkewich's first visit to AIRCOM as SACEUR.

The visit reaffirmed NATO's focus on adaptation, agility, and unity. Through continuous vigilance and forward-looking initiatives, AIRCOM remains at the forefront of NATO's transformation into a truly strategic warfighting command, ready to respond to any challenge from peace to crisis and conflict.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL HINDS ASSUMED COMMAND OF NATO'S ALLIED AIR COMMAND

U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Jason T. Hinds assumed command of NATO's Allied Air Command (AIRCOM), U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) and U.S. Air Forces Africa (AFAFRICA) during an official ceremony on Friday, 31 October 2025.

General Hecker relinquished command this summer to retire after 36 years of distinguished service; and Air Marshal Sir Johnny Stringer, Deputy Commander at AIRCOM, served as the acting commander in the interim.

In front of international senior military and civilian personnel representing NATO, the U.S., host nation Germany and local communities, General Alexus G. Grynkewich, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), conducted the assumption of command ceremony passing the guidon on to the new commander of AIRCOM, Lieutenant General Hinds.

Lieutenant General Hinds assumed command of NATO's air component, which directs and coordinates Allied Air and Space operations across the Euro-Atlantic area. This includes responsibility for maintaining the readiness, interoperability, and operational effectiveness of all NATO Air Forces, ensuring the Alliance's ability to deliver deterrence and defence from peace to crisis. In this domain, the Air Policing detachments currently in the Baltics and Romania, operating as part of the enhanced vigilance activity (eVA), Eastern Sentry, are tangible examples of Allied Air Command's commitment.

"Threats are very real, and they're becoming increasingly more complex. And threats are evolving at rates we have not experienced in recent history." Lieutenant General Hinds said in his remarks during his assumption of command ceremony. "We are and we must continue to rapidly adapt to this new threat environment, and work together as Allies and partners to be ready for the high-end fight," he added.

He closed the ceremony with a charge to the Alliance.

"Our unity, purpose and collective deterrence is our strength. And should deterrence fail, we must be ready to fight tonight, fight tomorrow and fight together."

GÉNÉRAL DE CORPS AÉRIEN GUILLAUME THOMAS - THE NEW DEPUTY COMMANDER OF ALLIED AIR COMMAND

Allied Air Command welcomes Général de corps aérien (OF-8) Guillaume THOMAS as new Deputy Commander with effect from October 30, 2025.

Général de corps aérien THOMAS is an experienced pilot, who began his operational career on the Hercules C130. In his early career he qualified as a captain and instructor, with operational deployments in Africa, the Middle East, and former Yugoslavia.

Joining NATO's Allied Air Command following a role of Chief of Staff of the French Air Defence and Air Operations Command, General THOMAS also served as the commander of the air component of Operation Barkhane and that of the NATO Response Force in 2022. In his role, he is also responsible for numerous conventional air operations conducted by the French Air and Space Force, such as those carried out on the eastern flank of Europe following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

General THOMAS is an officer of the Legion of Honor, commander of the National Order of Merit, and holder of the Aeronautics Medal. He has logged over 4,400 flight hours and 116 combat missions.

"I join AIRCOM staff as deputy commander with great determination, enthusiasm and pride. As war returns to the european continent, AIRCOM is making air and Space power a major advantage for the security and collective defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area. Now more than ever, we must be ready to respond together to all threats."

The position of Deputy Commander at Allied Air Command is alternatingly filled by a French and a British three-star general. The headquarters staff bid farewell to Air Marshal Sir Johnny Stringer, who handed over the mantle having served over three years as Deputy Commander, in a traditional headquarters walk-out ceremony.

In traditional fashion, Major General Frank Gräfe, Allied Air Command's Chief of Staff, provided Général de corps aérien Guillaume Thomas the official AIRCOM patch. Photo by Fanny Chesiere

NATO ANNUAL NUCLEAR EXERCISE, STEADFAST NOON

Photo courtesy of SHAPE Public Affairs Office

Allied Command Operations (ACO) initiated NATO's annual nuclear deterrence exercise, Steadfast Noon. The routine training, which was scheduled to run until October 24, involved up to 70 aircraft from 14 Allied countries and took place across four host nations and in the airspace over the North Sea region.

The primary objective of the exercise was to test and refine the Alliance's procedures to ensure the continued credibility, security, and effectiveness of NATO's nuclear deterrent. This long-planned, routine event was integral to maintaining readiness and promoting transparency regarding the Alliance's nuclear posture, and it was unrelated to current global events. No live nuclear weapons were involved.

Ahead of the exercise, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said that they needed to carry out the training because it helped ensure the nuclear deterrent remained as credible, safe, secure and effective as possible, and that it sent a clear signal to any potential adversary that the Alliance would and could protect and defend all allies against all threats.

During Steadfast Noon, service members rehearsed procedures related to the deployment of dual-capable aircraft units and the employment of conventional support assets in nuclear operations, ensuring all participating forces could coordinate effectively in a nuclear scenario.

Exercise operations were centered at Volkel Air Base (Netherlands), Royal Air Force Lakenheath (United Kingdom), Kleine-Brogel Air Base (Belgium), and Skrydstrup Air Base (Denmark). Participating nations included the four host countries, alongside contributors such as Finland, Poland, the United States, and Germany.

The training involved 13 different types of air assets, including dual-capable, fifth-generation fighter jets (such as the F-35), surveillance and reconnaissance assets, and refuelling aircraft (such as the E-3A Sentry and KC-135 Stratotanker) serving in a conventional support role for nuclear operations.

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NATO and its 32 Allies consider nuclear weapons a fundamental part of the Alliance's overall deterrence and defence strategy, aimed at preserving peace and preventing coercion.

U.S. BOMBER TASK FORCE CONCLUDED, STRENGTHENED ALLIED AIR INTEGRATION ON THE EASTERN FLANK

The conclusion of U.S. Bomber Task Force Europe on 24 November marked the end of a two-week deployment across multiple theatres, strengthening interoperability among NATO Allies and partners while demonstrating the Alliance's ability to project unparalleled Airpower

The conclusion of Bomber Task Force (BTF) Europe also marked another step in strengthening NATO's multi-domain deterrence on the eastern flank, as U.S. Air Force B-52H Stratofortress bombers integrated with Allied air forces from Finland, Lithuania and Sweden.

Operating from Spain, the B-52 aircraft conducted complex training missions spanning across Alliance territory. The deployment enhanced Allied interoperability, testing high-end tactics and reinforcing NATO's readiness to deter and defend in a contested security environment.

Through coordinated sorties over northern Europe, B-52 aircrews joined Finnish, Lithuanian and Swedish fighter aircraft in scenarios designed to counter anti-access and area-denial threats. Although not directly linked to Eastern Sentry, these types of missions underscore the basis for the Alliance's newest enhanced Vigilance Activity (eVA): NATO's multi-domain shield on the Eastern Flank. This new operational construct integrates air, land, maritime and space capabilities into an adaptive defensive network. The integration demonstrated NATO's ability to respond rapidly and proportionately to potential airborne threats across NATO airspace.

"Such a robust deployment sustains our lethality and reinforces our ability to project global combat power at a time and place of our choosing, while deterring our potential adversaries," said U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Dougherty, Commander of the 96th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron from Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, United States. "There is no replacement for hard power, and the B-52 personifies American strength."

Throughout the mission, B-52 crews rehearsed the find, fix, track and target (F2T2) process in coordination with NATO's E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, ensuring cross-domain awareness and interoperability.

The integration mission between the B-52s and NATO's E-3 AWACS also featured the first-ever photo and video documentation of the two aircraft flying together in formation.

This iteration of BTF illustrated the Alliance's enduring commitment to readiness and collective defence. By integrating with operations on the eastern flank, NATO underscored that Allied skies remain defended and secured.

POGGIO DART 25

OVER 30 ASSETS EMPLOYED IN A MULTI-DOMAIN ENVIRONMENT ENHANCING INTEROPERABILITY, UNITY AND STRENGTH

From November 24 to December 4, 2025, NATO's Exercise Poggio Dart 25 (PODA25) demonstrated the strength and solidarity of the NATO Alliance in the airspace over Italy. Hosted by the Italian Air Force and led by the Deployable Air Command and Control Center (DACCC) at Poggio Renatico, Italy, PODA25 is a key, wide-ranging exercise designed to test and strengthen the interoperability and operational readiness of Allied forces in air defence operations.

F-4 Phantom from the Turkish Air Force. Photo courtesy Turkish Air force

Re-deployment of the Deployable Air Defence Radar (DADR) to Cervia Air Base. Photo courtesy by DACCC

NATO E-3A AWACS from NAEW at Geilenkirchen airbase in Germany. Photo courtesy by NAEW&CF

Reflecting the multinational and multidomain commitment, the virtual and live training activities involved personnel and numerous assets from the Italian Armed Force, including F-35, EF-2000 and PA-200 Tornado fighter jets, C-130J transport aircraft and enablers such as the maritime patroller P72-A, air refueller KC-767A and Command and Control (Air C2) and ISR platform MQ-9A and E-550A CAEW from the Italian Air Force, along with F35 and AV-8B from Italian Navy and JTAC operators from Italian Army. Alongside with the Italian assets, F-16 fighter jets from the US Air Force based at Aviano in Italy and F-4 Phantom from the Turkish Air Force deployed at Istrana airbase, Italy.

One of the primary goals was to train the full spectrum of personnel - including aircrew, technical staff, logistics specialists, planners, Legal Advisors, and Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) controllers - in all aspects critical to a successful NATO air defence mission.

Major General Luca MAINERI, Commander of the DACCC, highlighted the strategic importance of the event: "With Exercise PODA25, the DACCC reinforces the capacity of NATO defence forces to act in unison in a modern and complex context, guaranteeing security and operational readiness in every scenario, demonstrating the Alliance's cohesion and efficiency in the field."

PODA25 provided a crucial opportunity to implement the Agile Combat Employment (ACE) concept, a priority for Allied Air Command. This was demonstrated via the logistical and technical re-deployment of the Deployable Air Defence Radar (DADR), a crucial mobile radar for integrated surveillance, to Cervia Air Base. The DADR's re-deployment - a key component of the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System (NATINAMDS) - provided a tangible demonstration of how the Alliance integrates and synchronizes operational and logistical activities among member nations.

Following the deployment, the Deployable Air Operation Center (DAOC) led the planning phase, executing the complex operations required to produce the Air Tasking Order (ATO), which guid all participating units in the multi-domain environment. During the culminating "live" phase, participating teams and crews enhanced interoperability between NATO and national systems by exercising with real air missions, interceptions, and attack/defence simulations, all coordinated through robust C2 coordination between various national and Allied components. This effort included the NATO E-3A AWACS from NAEW at Geilenkirchen airbase in Germany, an integrated surveillance, command, and control platform that provided an accurate, real-time picture of the battlespace to air and ground commanders.

The Deployable Air Control and Reporting System (DARS) played a fundamental role during these missions. The DARS, a fully deployable IAMD operational room, utilizes advanced tactical capabilities to integrate data from diverse sources. It interfaces seamlessly with numerous NATO and national assets, enabling the Alliance to tactically direct air missions, monitor airspace, and coordinate Allied air activities directly "in the field." Through the efficient and coordinated use of its deployable assets (DADR and DARS), the DACCC of Allied Air Command confirmed its capability to operate as an autonomous, fully interoperable Command and Control node, independent of fixed infrastructure. PODA25 successfully enhanced the unity and collective defence posture of the Alliance in the crucial domain of IAMD. PODA25 successfully enhanced the unity and collective defence posture of the Alliance in the crucial domain of IAMD.

Photo courtesy Italian Air Force

EUFOR ALTHEA

PROFESSIONALISM AND INTEROPERABILITY AT CAMP BUTMIR

The Romanian Air Force detachment "Dacian Pumas" continues to demonstrate Romania's professionalism and commitment to regional stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the European Union mission EUFOR ALTHEA. Since the start of the third rotation at Camp Butmir, Romanian personnel have reinforced their reputation for readiness, versatility, and dedication across all assigned tasks.

A central focus of the detachment's activity has been close cooperation with international partners. Romanian airmen conducted joint training with Italian troops from the Multinational Battalion, concentrating on rapid insertion techniques using fast-rope, coordination in complex operational scenarios, and enhanced interoperability. These exercises emphasized unit cohesion and camaraderie between contingents, underscoring the shared commitment to preserving peace and security in the region.

The "Dacian Pumas" contingent provided transport for a EUFOR Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team, composed of Hungarian EOD technicians and two trained canines, to conduct a mission to locate and neutralize unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Soldiers from the "Dacian Pumas" contingent, 3rd Rotation, have conducted joint training with troops from the Multinational Battalion (MNBN). The training focused on fast-rope insertion techniques for rapid deployment into operational areas, and the execution of an aerial medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) drill involving litter hoisting to simulate the extraction and transport of casualties from the field

Beyond tactical drills, the detachment marked Romania's Armed Forces Day with ceremonies and athletic competitions that strengthened ties among participating nations. Service members took part in running events, table tennis, and foot tennis, displaying discipline, respect, and sportsmanship. Colonel (AF) Silviu-Vasile Mărincaș, detachment commander, presented plaques and the rotation-III coin to personnel who distinguished themselves through professionalism and devotion to mission accomplishment.
"Dacian Pumas" also provided support to visiting European officials. During the visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, IAR-330 helicopters ensured secure and efficient transportation for the delegation, reflecting the detachment's high standards of professionalism. The unit additionally supported the first full FRONTEX operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, reinforcing European cooperation in border security and control.
Romanian service members were engaged in life-saving operations as well, conducting the first Search and Rescue (SAR) exercise since the mission's inception. Operating under challenging altitude and cold-weather conditions, teams executed MEDEVAC scenarios that tested response speed, coordination, and field efficiency. Joint drills with Slovak service members and local Mountain Rescue Service authorities strengthened the detachment's preparedness for emergency situations and highlighted Romania's commitment to humanitarian support and regional security. Interoperability remains a cornerstone of "Dacian Pumas" operations. Cooperation with SIPA BiH, EOD teams from Hungary, and Sarajevo International Airport has demonstrated the detachment's capability to operate in a coordinated manner with multiple agencies–conducting evacuations, neutralizing unexploded ordnance, and executing rapid responses in difficult terrain.
The contribution of Romanian personnel was recognized with the European Union Common Security and Defense Policy Medal for professionalism and dedication. The Latin inscription "Pro Pace Unum – United for Peace" underscores the detachment's dedication to maintaining stability and security across the area of operations. Visits by senior officials, including High Representative of the EU Kaja Kallas, highlighted the critical role played by "Dacian Pumas" within EUFOR ALTHEA.
Team spirit and military discipline were again on display at international sporting competitions held at Camp Butmir, where Romanian troops stood out for performance and fair play, further cementing relationships among participating contingents.
Through professional conduct, rigorous training, and an unwavering commitment to international cooperation, the "Dacian Pumas" detachment remains a standard-bearer of excellence for the Romanian Air Force. Their presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates not only Romania's engagement in preserving peace and stability but also the importance of air mobility and rapid-response capability in complex multilateral operations.

Story by Adrian Sultănoiu based on "Dacian Pumas" public affairs officer
Photos courtesy of "Dacian Pumas" detachment

Soldiers from the "Dacian Pumas" contingent, currently on their third rotation in the Camp Butmir Operational Theater, executed their first Search and Rescue (SAR) exercise on 9 October since the mission's start in January 2025. The exercise, conducted under arduous conditions of high altitude and low temperatures, tested the crews' ability to execute missions in a rapid, effective, and coordinated manner.
The scenario included a Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) sequence, in which the Romanian troops responded to evacuate and transport a simulated casualty from a hard-to-reach area.

"Dacian Pumas" - Always there when life needs wings!

A SYMBOL OF HOPE

C-130 Hercules – Air Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) in Support of Civilian Protection

Air medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) operations conducted in conflict zones are a vital capability, ensuring the rapid and secure extraction of wounded personnel and vulnerable civilians from hostile environments to facilities where they can receive proper medical care. These missions underscore the resolve of Allied and partner nations to uphold humanitarian principles and safeguard civilian lives.
The 90th Airlift Base delivers both strategic and tactical airlift for the Romanian Air Force, supporting national and multinational missions executed under UN, OSCE, EU, and NATO mandates. The unit also provides critical assistance to civil authorities during emergencies, strengthening national resilience and enhancing the country's overall crisis-response posture.

On the military ramp at an Israeli airfield, a Romanian C-130 Hercules prepared for departure on a MEDEVAC mission. A SMURD medical team and Romanian Air Force personnel reconfigured the aircraft's cargo compartment into a compact airborne medical treatment area. Patients on stretchers, children, and accompanying family members boarded the aircraft with a shared objective–reaching a safe environment where medical assistance is available.

The mission involved the evacuation of 10 patients and 23 accompanying relatives–Palestinian civilians affected by the escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip. It was one of Romania's most complex air medical evacuation operations over the past year.

From January through October of this year, Romania conducted seven MEDEVAC missions from Israel, transporting a total of 280 patients and relatives. Upon landing at Otopeni Airport after roughly 4.5 hours of flight, the aircraft was met by ambulances and medical personnel. For five of the patients, Romania served as a transit point before onward medical evacuation to the Netherlands aboard another Romanian military aircraft.

This mission was executed at the request of the Department for Emergency Situations, following coordination with the European Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Within hours, Romanian military, medical, and civilian institutions integrated their efforts to provide a rapid, coordinated response. The C-130 Hercules–normally configured for tactical airlift–was quickly adapted for medical evacuation, demonstrating the flexibility and readiness of Romanian Air Force capabilities.

These operations highlight the professionalism, interoperability, and humanitarian commitment of Romanian forces, contributing to wider Allied efforts to protect civilian populations and stabilize crisis environments.

THE PROFESSIONALS BEHIND THE MISSION

Behind every MEDEVAC operation is a dedicated team of specialists who carry out their duties without public recognition. Pilots, loadmasters, medical personnel, and technical staff work closely together to ensure safe, efficient, and compassionate evacuation of civilians affected by conflict.

A few days after the mission, we visited 90th Airlift Base to speak with crew members involved in recent MEDEVAC operations and learn more about the challenges and responsibilities associated with these flights.

Captain Claudia Popescu (C-130 Pilot) emphasized the human dimension of the mission:

"This mission had a strong emotional impact. You come into direct contact with people who have lived through conflict and are hoping for a safer future, especially for their children. Their suffering affects you. I was grateful to contribute, both as a pilot and as a person. Professionally, the mission confirmed that I am prepared for this level of responsibility. Personally, I was honored to help."

Warrant Officer Antoniu Marius Militaru – (C-130 Flight Engineer) described the mission planning process:

"These were long-duration missions with clearly defined objectives. Preparation considered time, the security environment, and flight safety. Despite extensive operational experience, including missions in Afghanistan, the children evacuated from Gaza left a lasting impression. In missions like this, the human aspect becomes more pronounced. We were determined to provide the highest level of support alongside the medical personnel from the Ministry of National Defence and IGSU."

Warrant Officer Adrian Jalbă (C-130 Loadmaster), who manages passenger safety and provides technical assistance during MEDEVAC flights, reflected on his experience: "I did my duty to help. What I witnessed was deeply moving–children affected by hardship and uncertainty. It is difficult to see them in such conditions. But during the flight, you could sense a slight return of hope. That made the effort worthwhile."

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As we departed 90th Airlift Base on a cold November day, the words of these professionals remained with us–reminders of the quiet dedication behind each mission. For a few hours, they provided safety, stability, and genuine hope to civilians fleeing conflict, contributing to the broader humanitarian objectives shared across NATO and European partners.

Story by Ioana-Cristina Teișanu
Photos by Maria Ioniță

Captain Claudia Popescu (C-130 Pilot) : " Personally, I was honored to help."

WHEN SERIOUSNESS BECOMES FLIGHT AND FLIGHT BECOMES PERFORMANCE:

THE FIRST ROMANIAN FAIP INSTRUCTOR IN ENJJPT

The youngest instructor flying the T-38 supersonic trainer in the 469th Squadron of the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training (ENJJPT) program is Romanian. Lieutenant Fusaru's performance at just 24 years old is all the more remarkable because it was achieved within a unique multinational training environment. ENJJPT is the only program of its kind in the world, operating exclusively in support of NATO and directly producing fighter pilots for Alliance air forces, with instructors, commanders, and students representing 14 partner nations.

Considering that most instructors log thousands of flight hours, have flown real-world missions, and bring deep multinational operational experience, Lieutenant Fusaru's achievement is exceptional. He is the youngest instructor in the squadron and the first Romanian selected to become an instructor immediately after completing ENJJPT as a student. Three more Romanian pilots are in training, with six additional candidates scheduled to follow. Romania already has instructors on both the T-6 and T-38, but none previously selected for a FAIP position.

"Each of us has been entrusted with a talent – whether skills, opportunities, or missions – and it is our duty to fully capitalize on it: to leave things better than we found them and to give more than we receive, regardless of the job or the context."

Romania in ENJJPT: Among the World's Military Pilot Elite

Run by the 80th Flying Training Wing at Sheppard Air Force Base, Wichita Falls, Texas, ENJJPT trains roughly 200 military fighter pilots each year in a fully integrated environment. A U.S. student might have a German instructor, a Dutch flight commander, and a Canadian squadron commander – each with distinct roles but a shared objective: to produce combat-ready pilots for their national air forces.

This is standardization and interoperability in action – where performance is not abstract but expected and measurable. Achieving it depends on the seriousness, discipline, and ambition of each student. Sheppard AFB is where the prerequisites for success are forged.

Romania joined ENJJPT in 2019 as the program's 14th partner nation. Six years later, the Romanian Air Force reached a new milestone: its first First Assignment Instructor Pilot (FAIP) – a role long established in countries like the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada, but new to Romania.

From the Air Force Academy to the Inner Circle of Global Performance

Lieutenant Claudiu Fusaru graduated from Unirea National College in Focșani and later from the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy in Brașov. He speaks with respect and gratitude for the teachers and instructors who shaped his foundation as an aviator and introduced him to the rigors and beauty of flight.

"The time I spent at the Air Force Academy helped me mature. It gave me my first exposure to flying – starting at age 19 – allowed me to build friendships I'd even call a brotherhood, and offered me the opportunity to develop my leadership skills."

His progression was rapid, built on discipline and focus. In just a few years, he completed training on the IAK-52, Cessna 172, and IAR-99 before being selected in 2023 for ENJJPT.

As a student, he completed Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) on the T-6 Texan II and T-38 Talon, followed by Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals (IFF), which includes air-to-air and air-to-ground combat. During IFF, he earned the Air-to-Air Top Gun Award – given to the student with the highest score in Basic Fighter Maneuvers (BFM) simulated engagements.

"Every phase of training was demanding and stressful, each with its own challenges, and everything was conducted entirely in English. Performance after each flight was evaluated through a standardized grade sheet tied to a strict syllabus. One of the most anticipated missions is the cross-country – flying outside the local area to other states. These flights expose students to non-standard situations: new instrument procedures, unfamiliar local rules, busy airports, and diverse radio environments.

Throughout this period I trained under roughly 100 flight and simulator instructors. I took the best practices from each, adapted their techniques to my own instructional style, and discarded behaviors that proved ineffective. I should also note there are seven other Romanian instructors here who fly and train daily to the required standard."

T-38 Talon – A Supersonic Jet with a Demanding Reputation

Central to his training is the T-38 Talon – an aircraft with exacting operational demands and an ideal platform for shaping aircrew to modern combat standards. Lt. Fusaru speaks highly of the jet, but beyond the exhilaration of flight his priority is mission completion, safe execution, and the full scope of responsibilities that come with each sortie.

"The T-38 is challenging to fly, full of restrictions, but offers a unique sensation in the air. Eventually, pure aircraft handling becomes secondary. The focus shifts to being a reliable wingman – executing the responsibilities assigned by the flight lead; to being a capable lead – planning, briefing, and commanding a formation of two, three, or four aircraft so the mission meets its objective and everyone returns safely; and to officership – acting according to the values of your nation and the Alliance."

From Student to Instructor – A Challenge Accepted

Upon completion of the training cycle, he was offered an instructor billet at ENJJPT – an offer he accepted to challenge himself and expand his capabilities. There he developed the core instructor competencies: directing, correcting, coaching, and supporting students through the qualification process for the T-6 Texan and T-38 Talon. After attending several courses as a student, Claudiu Fusaru completed Pilot Instructor Training (PIT) in three months and two weeks, qualifying in 53 flights. His toughest mission, however, remains the task of teaching and passing that knowledge on to others.

"There are students of different ages and ranks – a major may be flying with a lieutenant instructor – and the student addresses the instructor as 'Sir,' regardless of rank. The psychological factor is extremely important. I always try to create a relaxed environment throughout the event. I want the student to understand that I'm there to help, not just evaluate – to pass on as much guidance as possible from both my experience and the program's rigorous teaching procedures."

Fourteen NATO Nations, Countless Cultures, One Mission Language

At Sheppard AFB, the environment is defined by discipline, seriousness, and mutual respect. Pilots from fourteen NATO nations may have different backgrounds, but they share one operational language – the mission.

"We're instructors from 14 different countries, each with our own languages, cultures, religions, and traditions. But when it comes to flying, we're all on the same page. That's the purpose of the program: in combat we all speak the same language and apply the same procedures, from the first second to the last."

ENJJPT Doesn't Just Train Pilots – It Shapes Character

ENJJPT forms not only technically proficient supersonic pilots but also the character traits required of true combat aviators. From appearance and bearing to communication and discipline, everything contributes to building leaders with a winning mindset – role models worth emulating.

"Here, we're not just training pilots to fly airplanes – we're shaping future fighters with the mindset and skill set of winners. My colleagues, through their discipline, professionalism, training level, sacrifices, intellect, and mental and physical strength, provide not only an example of what a military aviator should be, but what a human being should be. I'm grateful to be part of this team and to learn from the best – people with experience in 4th- and 5th-generation fighters, with missions at home and around the world, in peace and in crisis."

At the end of our discussion, I asked Lieutenant Fusaru what he hopes to bring back to Romania.

"What concept would I bring home? To do what's expected of you – not just because you have to, but regardless of the circumstances, regardless of whether someone is watching or evaluating. And to execute one task, one mission, one job, at the highest level you can, instead of doing several things with mediocre results."

Ultimately, his message is about responsibility – to oneself and to future generations.

"Each of us has been entrusted with a 'talent' – skills, opportunities, or missions – and we have a duty to develop it, to leave something better behind, and to give more than we receive. My dream is to bring back as much experience as I can – hopefully one day to an fifth-generation multirole fighter aircraft squadron in Romania. I hope these words serve as information, inspiration, and motivation for young people seeking their path, and for those in their 'second youth' who still believe in new beginnings. With work and sacrifice, anything is possible. Romania may not always have had the best resources, but it has always produced people capable of excelling in any field."

Story by Ioana-Cristina Teișanu
Photos: Lt. Claudiu Fusaru, personal archive

SAFETY THROUGH SIMULATION: ROMANIAN AIR FORCE TRAINS PERUVIAN PILOTS ON C-27J SPARTAN

For approximately two weeks, at the Simulation Training Center at 90th Airlift Base in Otopeni, military pilots from the Peruvian Air Force (Fuerza Aérea del Perú – FAP) conducted recurrent training on the C-27J Spartan full-flight simulator.
The Peruvian aviators benefited from the experience, instruction, and guidance of pilots and technical-engineering personnel from Base 90. The training program used customized scenarios matched to each pilot's proficiency level, with the objective of meeting all planned training requirements, reinforcing aircraft procedures and tactics practiced through simulation, sharpening weather-related decision-making, conducting emergency procedures, and executing mission profiles adapted to tactical situations.

The Peruvian military personnel–Major (FAP) Juan Carlos Valdivia, Captain (FAP) Neil Mendoza Bustinza, and Captain (FAP) Diego Alfonso Alejandro Infante Mendoza–arrived at the Simulation Training Center determined to rehearse as many procedures and tactical scenarios as possible to strengthen their readiness and return home capable of executing operational missions to the highest standards. Their presence also enabled an important exchange of experience between Romanian and Peruvian C-27J flight crews.

"The center's mission has two main components. The first, and most obvious, is the operational side, where crews have the opportunity to train comprehensively–from A to Z–on the operational procedures of the C-27J platform, including the management of emergency scenarios. Using this flight simulator, we can replicate, practice, and train for any emergency that might occur during a flight. The second component is financial. Training costs are significantly reduced, given that we can conduct extensive emergency scenario training in the simulator," explained ***Colonel (AF) Florin Ianculescu, Chief Instructor Pilot.***

Colonel Florin Ianculescu (ROU AF), chief instructor pilot, highlighted the mission of the center:
"The training center has two main roles. The first is the operational role, where crews can train–from A to Z–for normal system operation on the C-27J platform as well as for the management of emergency situations. With this simulator, we can test, rehearse, and train for every type of emergency that may occur in flight. The second role is financial. Costs remain low because we can train emergency situations without operating the aircraft itself."

THE ROLE OF SIMULATION IN MISSION READINESS

The C-27J Spartan simulator is an essential tool in the aircrew training process. It accurately replicates the cockpit and onboard systems and, by generating realistic operational environments, allows crews to practice normal, abnormal, and emergency procedures, including complex tactical scenarios, without the risks associated with live flight.
Simulator training enables pilots to accumulate valuable training hours, improve coordination and decision-making, and maintain proficiency while significantly reducing both flight-hour costs and airframe wear. As a result, the simulator directly enhances the safety, efficiency, and operational preparedness of C-27J Spartan pilots.

PERUVIAN PILOTS – TRAINING EXPERIENCE AND TAKEAWAYS

At the end of their training cycle, the Peruvian pilots shared impressions of the experience and the knowledge exchange with their Romanian counterparts.
Major (FAP) Juan Carlos Valdivia stated:
"Our experience was extremely beneficial. We come here to rehearse emergency situations that may occur during aircraft operation. Simulator training is invaluable because it saves money and, more importantly, ensures that during real flights we are safer, having already practiced these situations under controlled conditions."
Captain (FAP) Neil Mendoza Bustinza highlighted common operational challenges between the two air forces:
"From the first day, we were able to share experience with Romanian Air Force pilots. We face similar operational conditions. In Peru, we often fly in high-altitude areas and operate from short landing zones. Our geography is highly diverse–coastline, the Andes, and the Amazon jungle. In the Andes, we operate in regions over 12,000 feet, requiring takeoffs and landings in demanding terrain. In the jungle, we operate from short, remote landing strips to support civic-action missions for isolated communities."
Captain (FAP) Diego Alfonso Alejandro Infante Mendoza emphasized the importance of flight safety:
"Operational safety is a priority for us and for aviation in general. That is why we were sent to the Romanian Air Force–to contribute to operational safety through simulator training that prepares us for emergencies and unexpected situations. Your instructors have extensive experience with this aircraft. I received valuable insights and recommendations that will help me throughout my career. The team here is highly qualified and knowledgeable about every system of the aircraft, and we are here to learn and apply that expertise in our own units."

"Operational safety is a top priority for us and for our institution, particularly in aviation. That's why we were sent to the Romanian Air Force–to contribute to operational safety through simulated training. These exercises allow us to practice emergency scenarios and other situations we must be prepared to handle, ensuring readiness for any eventuality in flight.
The experience here is extensive, with many flight hours on this type of aircraft. I feel particularly advantaged, having learned a great deal, received detailed information, and gained practical recommendations that will be valuable throughout my career as a pilot. During our stay, it was clear that the instructors and staff are highly qualified, with deep knowledge of the aircraft and its systems. Our mission here is to acquire this expertise and be able to adapt and apply it in our own country," – emphasized ***Captain Diego Alfonso Alejandro Infante Mendoza, FAP.***

Brigadier-General Emil Tecuceanu (left), Commander of 90th Airlift Base, presented diplomas to the Peruvian pilots, formally certifying the successful completion of their training cycle. The moment highlighted the commitment to the highest standards of operational readiness and safety

Inside the C-27J full-flight simulator, Peruvian pilots trained alongside Romanian instructors. The simulator faithfully reproduces the cockpit and all onboard systems, enabling aircrews to rehearse responses to any contingency in a safe, cost-effective environment

THE VALUE OF SIMULATION – ROMANIAN AIR FORCE PERSPECTIVE

Colonel Florin Ianculescu (ROU AF) also spoke about the realism and necessity of simulation:
"In simulation, conditions aren't 100 percent identical to reality, but more than 85-90 percent are very close. This allows us to train ourselves and our international partners so that all crews 'speak the same language'–meaning identical normal and emergency procedures regardless of nationality.
We can practice procedures in various weather conditions, including unfavorable or extreme scenarios that are impossible or unsafe to replicate in real flight. When crews later encounter such conditions in live operations, they are prepared.
For 10 years, since the center was established at Base 90, we've trained crews from multiple countries, including Greece and Italy. During these exchanges, we confirmed that our normal and emergency procedures align closely.
On the tactical side, although real-world flying is essential, a crew can fly one to three years without experiencing a single emergency. This creates the risk of skill-fade. Therefore, every six months aircrews are required to complete simulator sessions to rehearse all emergency procedures annually."

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CONCLUSION

Mandatory periodic training on the C-27J Spartan simulator ensures that aircrew members maintain proficiency under optimal conditions. Through simulation, crews practice the full spectrum of anticipated and unforeseen situations that may occur during flight, directly supporting mission readiness, operational safety, and international interoperability.

Story by Ioana Teișanu
Photos by Maria Ioniță

Peruvian Air Force pilots, alongside their Romanian Air Force instructors, at the C-27J Spartan full-flight simulator at 90th Airlift Base

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

With a composed demeanor and a steady, assured voice, Lieutenant Bianca Botaș stands among the distinguished cadre of Romanian military aviators. As the second woman to qualify on the F-16 within the Romanian Air Force, she has transformed discipline, commitment, and a drive for challenge into the momentum required to achieve her professional aspirations.
Her journey–from the first time she donned a military uniform as a student at the national military college in Alba Iulia to executing missions from the cockpit of the F-16 multirole fighter–reflects a narrative of courage, balance, and the emergence of a new generation that is redefining the nation's relationship with military aviation.

Lieutenant Bianca "*Elsa*" Botaș serves as an F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot with the 48th Fighter Squadron at Câmpia Turzii, operating under the 71st Air Base. Her military trajectory began at the Mihai Viteazul National Military College in Alba Iulia, where she first wore the uniform and was introduced to the aviation branch. What began as a pursuit of structured academic training quickly evolved into a professional pathway shaped by discipline, competitive selection, and a growing interest in operational aviation.
Following her graduation from the military college, Lieutenant Botaș attended the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy in Brașov, completing in parallel the curriculum of the Higher School of Civil Aviation at Strejnicu and Băneasa. She conducted her initial flight training at the academy–her first time flying in any aircraft–an experience she recalls as both demanding and formative. After commissioning, she advanced to the basic flight course at Boboc, building foundational skills and flight hours on the IAR-99 Șoim trainer at the 95th Air Base "Erou Căpitan Aviator Alexandru Șerbănescu" in Bacău. This phase was essential for meeting the prerequisites for entry into the European F-16 Training Center (EFTC) at Borcea.

INSIDE THE F-16 FIGHTER SQUADRON

At EFTC, the F-16 qualification pipeline begins with intensive academics covering aircraft systems, emergency procedures, weapons employment, and tactical operations. This is followed by a structured simulator phase designed to ensure pilots can manage all standard and contingency scenarios before advancing to live-flight training. "It is a high-tempo period characterized by heavy cognitive load, strict performance standards, and sustained physical and mental demands," Lieutenant Botaș notes.

TRAINING FOR PRECISION AND READINESS

Despite the pressure inherent to fighter training, she emphasizes that flying provides both professional motivation and operational clarity. While mission execution requires near-continuous focus, she acknowledges that certain moments in flight–particularly at altitude–underscore the broader purpose of her role as a military aviator.
Her family initially expressed concern regarding the risks associated with tactical aviation; however, their support solidified as her career advanced and she proved her capability across each phase of training.
For several months, Lieutenant Botaș has been fully integrated into the 48th Fighter Squadron, a unit reactivated and brought to operational capacity in early 2025 following the arrival of former Royal Norwegian Air Force F-16s. She describes the squadron as a highly professional environment committed to modernization and future capability development, especially in anticipation of the fifth-generation multirole fighter aircraft transition planned for the 71st Air Base.

Until that transition occurs, the squadron operates exclusively with the F-16 Fighting Falcon, a multirole platform capable of both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions. Lieutenant Botaș highlights the aircraft's maneuverability, advanced flight-control architecture, and the advantages of its fly-by-wire system, which reduces pilot workload and enhances precision across a wide envelope of mission sets.
As the second woman to qualify on the F-16 within the Romanian Air Force, she notes that the distinction is not her focus. "We operate to the same standards and execute the same missions. What matters is performance, readiness, and contributing to the squadron's operational objectives." Even so, she recognizes the responsibility of serving as a reference point for younger women pursuing aviation careers.
"I did not necessarily set out with a female role model," explains Lieutenant Botaș. "Role models can be of any gender. For young women pursuing military aviation, persistence is critical. I have demonstrated that it is possible to evolve and perform in an environment that many consider more demanding, even traditionally male-dominated."
Lieutenant Botaș emphasizes the core attributes required for military aviation: discipline, physical and mental resilience, and a constructive attitude. "Future pilots must be able to accept feedback without taking

SOARING WITH DISCIPLINE

it personally, understand that all evaluation is designed to enhance personal performance and squadron effectiveness, and be prepared for continuous learning. Courage and commitment to development are essential."

OPERATIONAL DISCIPLINE IN ACTION

Beyond the adrenaline and operational excitement of flight, military aviation involves extensive planning and routine processes that are less visible externally. "A typical day in the squadron begins with mission prioritization and training objectives," Lieutenant Botaș explains. "Two hours before takeoff, we conduct a detailed mission briefing, reviewing expected conditions, potential contingencies, and tactical responses. This is followed by aircraft preparation, systems checks, and execution of the flight profile."
Post-flight procedures include mission debriefings, a critical component of aviation operations. Pilots evaluate mission performance, identify lessons learned, and discuss corrective measures for any deviations. Administrative responsibilities and planning for upcoming missions complete the cycle. "I value the mission planning process. Personally preparing each flight allows me to approach execution with greater situational awareness and readiness," she notes.

SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PILOTS

Lieutenant Botaș's career demonstrates the elimination of gender barriers in modern military aviation. Her performance reflects that standards of professionalism, technical proficiency, and dedication define success. Each sortie she completes contributes to the operational capability of the 48th Fighter Squadron and supports the evolution of a modern, multifunctional Air Force, instilling a culture of perseverance, precision, and pride in operating advanced combat aircraft.

Story by Dorin Luca
Photos by Alexandru Aioanei

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Photo by WO Daniel Tuduriu

JULY

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DECEMBER

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AIR FORCE PARTNERSHIPS: JOINT TRAINING AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

From 2 to12 December 2025, Romania was hosted the 37th edition of the Joint Personnel Recovery Staff Course (JPRSC), conducted under the authority of the European Defence Agency (EDA), within the framework of the multinational Personnel Recovery Education and Training Courses (PR-ETC) project.

The course features a clear multinational focus, bringing together participants from Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Spain, and Romania, reflecting a shared commitment to cooperation and joint training across Europe. For Romania, this edition represents an important step in its institutional development: it is the first course organized after obtaining full PR-ETC membership in October 2025. This achievement concludes a process that began nearly five years ago, during which Romania consistently pursued its objective of full integration into the European training community dedicated to Personnel Recovery.
As this accession process moved forward, the Air Force Staff, tasked with representing Romania in the project, began organizing the JPRSC at the national level three years ago, contributing to continuity in the field. Working alongside it, the 85th Air Communications and Information Center and the Boboc Air Force Training Base serve as permanent institutional partners involved in planning and conducting each edition, providing the necessary technical, logistical, and academic support.
By hosting JPRSC 37, Romania naturally continues the path initiated five years ago and reaffirms its active role within PR-ETC, contributing to the strengthening of European cooperation in Personnel Recovery and to the advancement of shared education and training at the European level.

Story by Colonel Silviu Mardari

TTX – STRENGTHENING AIRSPACE CONTROL

From November 3 to 6, 2025, the headquarters of the Air Component Command and the 85th Aero Communications and Informatics Center hosted a Table Top Exercise (TTX) focused on the application of rules of engagement for national airspace control, alongside a specialized convocation of legal advisors from the Air Force and Naval Forces.

During the exercise, participants analyzed and resolved hypothetical operational scenarios with support from Master Controllers, F-16 pilots, and operational law specialists. The event underscored the importance of increasing the frequency of such exercises, given the current geopolitical context and ongoing threats to national airspace.
The specialized convocation addressed topics that frequently raise interpretative questions in advisory activities, aiming to establish a unified practice and harmonize case analysis across the branches. Participants also discussed the potential need to update specific legal regulations to reflect the evolving operational and social environment.
Attending the activities alongside Air Force legal advisors were representatives from central military structures, the Naval Forces, Land Forces, and Special Operations Forces. Senior officials present included Lieutenant General Radu Anton Cipu, Chief of the General Legal Directorate; Major General Gheorghe Mocanu, Chief of the Directorate for the Prevention and Investigation of Corruption and Fraud; and Maria Cristea, representing the Military Court of Appeal.

Story and photos by Theodor Frîncu

TRANSPORTABLE WEATHER RADAR TRAINING ENHANCES FLIGHT SAFETY CAPABILITIES

The 85th Training and Instruction Center hosted a training program focused on the E700XD transportable weather radars, produced by EWR Radar Systems – USA. This program represents the primary training phase for equipping the Air Force with transportable weather radars. In the upcoming months, follow-on activities will include installation, testing, and acceptance of the radars within the Air Force units.

The training program was delivered by EWR specialists and consisted of two main courses. The first focused on radar operation for the generation and use of meteorological products and was designed for meteorologists from the air bases that will receive data from these radars. The second course targeted radar operation and maintenance and was intended for radar specialists from the radiolocation subunits where the weather radars will be installed. Practical, hands-on sessions were conducted during on-site installation and acceptance testing, providing experience both in operational use of meteorological products and in radar installation and maintenance.
The EWR E700XD is a transportable meteorological radar specifically designed for military and tactical applications. It is lightweight, easily transported and installed, highly reliable, and simple to maintain. It provides over 20 meteorological products primarily aimed at ensuring flight safety. The radar serves as the main portable meteorological radar for the U.S. Army and is actively used by the U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Special Operations Command, and the U.S. Air Force.
The modernization of the Air Force's meteorological capabilities will continue next year with the reception and installation of fixed C-band radars. Together with the transportable systems, these radars will form an integrated meteorological radar network. This network will significantly enhance flight safety by providing fast, accurate, and comprehensive information on dangerous weather phenomena.

Story by Colonel Bogdan Marinescu
ROU-AF, Logistic Branch
Radar, EW, UAS & C-UAS Service

ELEVATING READINESS

SKY LORDS SHARPEN THEIR F-16 SKILLS

71st Air Base, Câmpia Turzii – Modernization is the order of the day. The recent arrival of F-16 Fighting Falcons and extensive infrastructure upgrades have brought a new operational tempo to this major Transylvanian aviation unit. At the 48th Fighter Squadron – the "Sky Lords" – maintenance and engineering personnel carry out their duties with professionalism and an uncompromising focus on safe flight operations.

> *"Everything starts with training. Most of the engineers and military foremen assigned here have completed courses in Norway. I also learn from those with more experience. I have undertaken extensive training at Borcea through various courses, specializations, and advanced studies. Continuous professional development is essential–each person improves, gains knowledge, and strives for more.*
>
> **Second Lieutenant Engineer Adelin Leahu**

Aviation engineers and military foremen form the backbone of the 48th Fighter Squadron. Every aircraft, sortie and mission is handled with the highest level of responsibility, even as much of the squadron's maintenance workforce is relatively young.

Second Lieutenant Adelin Leahu, aerospace engineer, hails from Avram Iancu Commune, Alba County. He decided in seventh grade to pursue a military career, drawn by order, discipline and the stability provided by military service. He graduated from the "Mihai Viteazul" National Military College in Alba Iulia in 2020. His first exposure to Air Force operations came in 10th grade during a visit to the 71st Air Base, when the MiG-21 LanceR was still in service. That visit confirmed his interest in aircraft systems and maintenance.
"I first saw an F-16 in Borcea during 11th grade. From that point, I wanted to work on this aircraft," says Leahu. "I've learned a lot and I'm applying it in the field. The F-16 maintenance manuals, schematics and fault trees are clear and procedural – they guide you step by step and direct you to the proper branch based on the defect or special case."
After commissioning, Leahu served for one year at the 86th Air Base in line maintenance. He was seconded to the 71st Air Base in the summer and intends to remain.
The squadron has the trained personnel, logistical support and material readiness required to meet operational demands. While many technicians are early in their careers, experienced foremen who previously worked on the MiG-21 LanceR bring valuable institutional knowledge that eases the transition to a new platform.
"The work environment here is dynamic – fast paced and constantly evolving," Leahu adds. "We learn from every situation and rely on teamwork. The mission's end state is always a safe flight. I'm proud to be part of a growing team working toward that common goal."
Warrant Officer Laura Pintilie, from Turda, Cluj County, specializes in fixed-wing aircraft maintenance. Coming from a military family – her father served as a CBRN foreman in an armored unit – she pursued a technical and military education track. After studies in precision mechanics and a master's in precision engineering and quality management, she graduated top of her class from the Military School of Warrant Officers and NCOs of the Air Force in Boboc in 2021. She is also pursuing a doctorate in industrial engineering, which she expects to complete next year.
WO Pintilie recalls joining the 71st Air Base and working on the MiG-21 LanceR before returning from parental leave to take on the F-16. "Everything was challenging and interesting," she says. "Now we're working with high-performance systems, new tools and a different maintenance concept. That shift was inevitable – the future is materializing here at the 71st."
She notes the squadron's mix of youth and experience, and that professional development is ongoing. Several colleagues attended conversion courses in Norway and share lessons learned with the team. Where she once was the only woman in the squadron for several years, there are now more female maintainers integrated into an effective, cohesive team.
The 71st Air Base continues to invest in people and infrastructure to sustain F-16 operations. The 48th Fighter Squadron's maintenance crew – engineers and foremen alike – remain committed to readiness, safety and continuous improvement.

> *"I take great satisfaction serving here. We do our jobs well, and operations are proceeding as they should. We learn every day, and–if the opportunity arises–I would welcome the chance to deploy on an overseas mission flying our F-16 Fighting Falcon.*
>
> **Warrant Officer Laura Pintilie**

Story and photo by Lucian Irimia

PERFORMANCE THROUGH READINESS:
ROMANIAN AIR FORCE AIRMAN WINS BEST WARRIOR 2025

The inclusion of allied and partner nations in the Best Warrior Competition reflects a shared commitment to interoperability, high training standards, and the strengthening of strategic partnerships. The Romanian Air Force's presence and performance at Best Warrior 2025 confirm the high level of personnel readiness and full integration into a professional military community founded on excellence, competence, and mutual respect.

The Best Warrior Competition is recognized as one of the most demanding individual evaluations of military proficiency conducted by the United States Armed Forces and allied partners. Held annually under the authority of the Alabama National Guard, the event assesses individual warrior skills, physical and mental resilience, operational discipline, and leadership under sustained stress.
The competition is conducted in a training environment designed to replicate the complexity of the contemporary operational battlespace. Competitors complete tactical lanes, physical events and cognitive evaluations intended to test adaptability, situational awareness and decision-making under pressure.
Romania's participation in Best Warrior reflects a deliberate approach to multinational training and professional development.

"Someone told me, 'You have no idea what you accomplished,' and, to be honest, I still don't. I think I need a little time to wake up and let it sink in. Overall, it was an extraordinary experience–very demanding physically: many events, back to back. I was up at 0530 and didn't get back until 1700. There were a lot of unknowns that I hope and intend to make known to those who follow. Even if some call me a superman, I'm not; I am prepared, yes, but I'll need a few days to return to 'factory settings.'" **– said Corporal Ioan Dănuț Ștefan**

In 2025, the Romanian Air Force recorded a significant international accomplishment at Best Warrior, hosted by the Alabama National Guard at Fort McClellan, Alabama. Corporal Ioan Dănuț Ștefan, assigned to the 71st Air Base, Câmpia Turzii, placed first overall and was named Soldier of the Year 2025. His performance demonstrated high individual readiness, sustained physical and mental endurance, operational discipline, and the ability to perform effectively in demanding training conditions. Corporal Ioan Dănuț Ștefan was also named the Romanian Air Force's 2025 Soldier of the Year after winning the service-level "Best of the Best 2025" competition.
Romania's 2025 contingent comprised four members: Master Sergeant Ciprian Popov; Staff Sergeant Mihai Bușilă; Corporal Ioan-Dănuț Ștefan and Private First Class Cosmin-Andrei Varga. The participation of Romanian service members in the competition resulted from close cooperation at the senior enlisted level between the Romanian Armed Forces and the Alabama National Guard, under the bilateral military partnership established through the State Partnership Program. Their participation was enabled by coordination between command noncommissioned officer channels of the Romanian Armed Forces and the Alabama National Guard, underscoring the effectiveness of bilateral professional military cooperation.
Corporal Ștefan's achievement is both an individual distinction and a professional milestone for the 71st Air Base, the Romanian Air Force, and the Romanian Armed Forces. The result reinforces Romania's standing as a capable and reliable partner in multinational training environments and combined professional military activities.
Congratulations, Dănuț, for the determination, discipline, and professionalism you demonstrated. Your achievement sets a standard worth following and serves as an example for future generations of Air Force professionals.

Story by ROU AF PAO

The competition included a 50-meter combat swim; a 3-kilometer combat run over varied terrain; the Army Fitness Test; land navigation and map reading; a formal evaluation board; written and general military knowledge assessments; a 20-kilometer tactical road march with a 20-kilogram combat load; call for fire procedures; combat lifesaver tasks, including a 9-line MEDEVAC request; dynamic live-fire with the 9 mm M17 pistol and 5.56 mm M4A1 rifle, including primary-to-secondary weapon transitions; timed weapons disassembly and assembly; a media interview; and a surprise stress shoot. Collectively, the events assessed the full range of skills required of a warfighter operating in a complex, demanding, and unpredictable operational environment.

BUILDING GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

Between October 27 and November 1, 2025, a delegation from the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy in Brașov participated in the 13th edition of International Week, hosted by the Republic of Korea Air Force Academy.
The event brought together representatives from 39 nations, providing a platform for the exchange of expertise, dialogue, and cooperation among military aviation academies worldwide. Over six days, the delegation engaged in cultural activities, defense industry visits, leadership sessions, and academic events, actively promoting the values, professionalism, and camaraderie of Romanian cadets.
Through initiatives like this, the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy continues to strengthen its international partnerships, offering students valuable training experiences in a multicultural operational environment.

Story by "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy Public Affairs Office

ADVANCING TECHNICAL EXPERTISE ABROAD

Fourteen students from the Military School of Warrant Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Air Force "Traian Vuia" participated in a practical training course at the ADA Instituto Técnico Superior in Seville, under the Erasmus+ program.
The activities were conducted in state-of-the-art workshops, where students enhanced their knowledge of aircraft maintenance and repair while gaining hands-on experience in an international environment dedicated to technical excellence.
The program was closely observed by the school's commander, Commander Cătălin-Relu Băsescu, who monitored the students' progress and professional skill development in a multinational context.
Accompanying the group was their mascot, Pedro the apple, who brought smiles and positive energy throughout the activities. Whether "participating" in hands-on exercises or appearing in photos from cultural visits, Pedro consistently contributed to team morale. It is even humorously said that Pedro is the first apple to learn about aviation and teamwork!

Story by Military School of Warrant Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Air Forceof the Air Force "Traian Vuia" Public Affairs

IAR-330 PUMA HELICOPTER

50 YEARS
OF CONTINUITY THROUGH MODERNIZATION

In the 1970s Romania sought to adopt advanced military technologies and launched a series of Western European partnerships to modernize its helicopter fleet. That effort began with a 1970 contract for the IAR-316 Alouette III light helicopter. Building on that success, Romania signed a licensing agreement with French manufacturer Aérospatiale on July 30, 1974, for local production of the SA 330 Puma medium transport helicopter. The partnership with a NATO country brought the Romanian armed forces a platform with markedly enhanced capabilities. In the same period Romania also acquired SA-365N Dauphin light twin-engine transports from France in two batches: two aircraft in 1979 (YR-DFE, YR-DFF) and two in 1980 (YR-DFG, YR-DFH).

HISTORICAL MOMENT – OCTOBER 22, 1975

Puma operations in Romania began on October 22, 1975, when the IAR-330 prototype (tactical No. 02) made its first flight from the I.Av. Brașov factory airfield (Brașov Aviation Factory airfield, today IAR S.A. Ghimbav).

That milestone kicked off crew and ground-technical training: initially at the Ghimbav factory for hands-on systems and maintenance training, followed by flight training in France under French instructor teams. Production of the IAR-330 H variant continued through 1977. With the introduction of composite main-rotor blades, production shifted to the IAR-330 L variant. The new blades improved aircraft performance – higher cruise speed, better hover capability, and increased maximum takeoff weight.

IAR-330 Puma L-RM

The IAR-330 quickly demonstrated its operational value in support of multiple strategic national projects. Its missions included logistical support for the construction of the Transfăgărășan highway and major hydroelectric facilities, disaster response and flood relief operations during the 1970s, maritime logistics support to offshore drilling platforms, and providing secure air transport for government and military personnel

The IAR-330 rapidly proved its value across national projects: it supported construction of the Transfăgărășan road and major hydroelectric works, conducted flood relief operations in the 1970s, provided transport to offshore drilling platforms, and served as a reliable transport for government and military officials.

A STRATEGIC ARCHITECTURE

The introduction of domestically produced helicopters into the Romanian Air Force – the IAR-316B Alouette III (250 built, 120 for the Romanian Air Force) and the IAR-330 L Puma (160 built, 112 in the military configuration) – drove a major expansion and reorganization of the country's rotary-wing force structure:

– July 1976: The 126th Helicopter Squadron stood up at Boteni airfield. In 1977 it was redesignated the 61st Helicopter Regiment, configured with two IAR-330 Puma squadrons and one IAR-316B Alouette III squadron.

– August 6, 1976: The 141st Helicopter Squadron formed at Mihail Kogălniceanu airfield. On July 1, 1977 it became the 59th Helicopter Regiment and deployed to Tuzla airfield from May 15–19, 1978. Initially, the 59th consisted of one IAR-330 squadron and two IAR-316B squadrons; after 1985 it was organized with two IAR-330 squadrons and one IAR-316B squadron. The unit's mission set included coastal defense, cooperation with Romanian Navy, and support to offshore drilling platforms. Several IAR-316B and IAR-330 airframes were specially configured with inflatable floats, sea-survival suits, and inflatable boats to mitigate forced-ditching risk.

– October 1-30, 1976: The 115th Helicopter Squadron was established at Sibiu airfield and initially fell under the Territorial Anti-Aircraft Defense Command. On May 1, 1977 it transferred to the Military Aviation Command, and on October 30, 1978 it joined the 70th Aviation Division. Personnel from this unit transitioned to IAR-316B and IAR-330 types within the 94th Helicopter Regiment at Alexeni between October 18 and November 30, 1976. In October 1978 the unit reorganized as the 58th Helicopter Regiment. Initially composed of one IAR-316B squadron and one IAR-330 squadron, by 1979 the 58th fielded two IAR-330 squadrons and one IAR-316B squadron. The regiment specialized in mountain operations and supported the 4th Army.

– June 30, 1981: Squadron 131 was formed at Alexeni airfield to enhance helicopter aircrew training. Directly subordinate to the Military Aviation Command, Squadron 131 delivered both classroom and practical flight instruction. From inception until 1987 it operated three flights – one IAR-316B and two IAR-330 – and after 1987 its structure included one flight each of IAR-316B, IAR-330, and Mi-8.

– October 1, 1982: A helicopter detachment from the 58th Regiment at Sibiu established a squadron in Caransebeș. On August 1, 1984 that unit became the 73rd Helicopter Regiment, composed of two IAR-330 squadrons and one IAR-316B squadron, specializing in mountain flying for Romania's southwest region.

– September 1986: The 60th Helicopter Regiment stood up at Tecuci with two IAR-330 squadrons and one IAR-316B squadron to cover the northeast sector. Both the Alouette III and the Puma were mission-flexible and could be employed in search-and-rescue operations using a removable rescue hoist – pneumatically operated on the IAR-316B and hydraulically on the IAR-330. By contrast, the Soviet types then in service with the Romanian Air Force (Mi-8 and Mi-17) used a fixed hoist.

IAR-330 SOCAT

IAR-330: a constant enabler for joint missions and training across the armed forces

IAR-330 NAVAL

CONTINUING EVOLUTION

A major leap for the IAR-330 Puma came with the SOCAT (Electro-Optical Targeting and Combat Anti-Tank System) modernization program, launched in 1996 in partnership with Israel's Elbit Systems. SOCAT transformed the Puma from a pure transport into a combat-capable platform, fitted with a 20 mm GIAT cannon, Spike anti-tank guided missiles, and an advanced sensor suite. The IAR-330 SOCAT prototype first flew in May 1998.

The IAR-330 family later grew to include multiple variants: the Puma M (transport/trainer), a naval configuration outfitted for maritime operations for the Romanian Naval Forces, and a MEDEVAC configuration that functions as a true flying hospital.

Beginning in 2019–2020, Romania launched a broad revitalization and modernization effort for the IAR-330L Puma (transport/MEDEVAC) fleet. The program upgrades included modern avionics, enhanced sensors, added protection, and electronic-warfare systems. A key modernization contract with IAR S.A. Brașov aimed to convert IAR-330L airframes into the IAR-330 L-RM configuration.

ROMANIAN PUMA ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

Romania's experience with the Puma also extended to international operations.

2005–2006: IAR-330 SOCAT helicopters deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of EUFOR Althea, marking one of the Romanian Air Force's first operational missions outside the country since World War II.

October 2019–October 2020: Romania sent an air detachment – the "Carpathian Pumas" – to Gao, Mali. The detachment included four IAR-330 Puma L-RM helicopters and roughly 120 personnel (pilots, technicians, and medical staff). Operating in two six-month rotations, their tasking included MEDEVAC, troop and cargo transport, and patrol/reconnaissance in support of UN operations.

January 2025: Romania renewed its contribution to EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The "Dacian Pumas" detachment comprised four helicopters (IAR-330 Puma M and Puma L-RM) and about 100 personnel, including pilots, technicians, medical, and logistics teams.

Beyond operational deployments, two IAR-330 helicopters represented the Romanian Air Force in the aerial demonstration at the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels – a notable moment of national pride.

The IAR-330 Puma's story in Romania continues: through sustained modernization and recapitalization, the domestically produced and upgraded Puma remains a cornerstone of national defense capability and a vital search-and-rescue and MEDEVAC asset. Its longevity, enabled by targeted upgrades, demonstrates how modernization can preserve strategic advantage across decades.

Story by Adrian Sultănoiu based on CER SENIN archive
Photo: CER SENIN archive

CARPATHIAN PUMAS - A GREAT CONTRIBUTION OF ROMANIAN HELICOPTER

The mission of the ROU Helicopter Detachment consisted of medical and casualty evacuations with the helicopters. In one year of deployment, ROU HELI DET performed 18 MEDEVAC missions, and hundreds of general utility transport missions. Also, Romanian helicopters provided reconnaissance and aerial surveillance to ensure the freedom of movement of UN troops on the ground, of great importance for assuring the security of MINUSMA logistical convoys. In terms of missions, Romanian helicopters accomplished almost 400 transport missions, reconnaissance and aerial surveillance flights, with more than 1250 hours flown over the malian terrain.

Blue Helmets Newsletter (United Nation Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) - february 2021

IAR-330 L-RM during SAR in EUFOR Althea mission

IAR-99: THE EVOLUTION OF A SYMBOL

In the 1970s, while Romanian flight schools still flew the L-29 Delfin and L-39 Albatros, a team of engineers at INCREST (today INCAS) began designing a modern, domestically produced aircraft tailored to the operational needs of the Romanian Air Force. For more than four decades the IAR-99 has been a constant in Romania's skies. From the prototype's maiden flight in 1985, through its presentation at the Paris Air Show (Le Bourget) in 1999, to flight testing of the SM (Modernized Standard) variant in 2023, the Romanian advanced jet trainer has spanned eras, doctrines, and generations of pilots. In an age of increasingly complex systems, the IAR-99 demonstrates that an in-country platform engineered by Romanian specialists can deliver mission success reliably and efficiently.

The IAR-99 – the first jet trainer and school aircraft designed and built entirely in Romania – was developed to replace the Czech L-29 Delfin and L-39 ZA Albatros. Prototype S-001 made its maiden flight on December 21, 1985, with Lt. Col. Ștefănel Vagner at the controls. Conceived by researchers at INCREST (now INCAS), the airframe features a semi-monocoque fuselage and two tandem cockpits fitted with ejection seats (originally British-made; currently produced domestically). Propulsion is provided by a Rolls-Royce Viper 632-41 turbojet, license-built by Turbomecanica, producing approximately 3,999 lbf (≈ 1,814 kgf). The airframe uses a trapezoidal wing and retractable tricycle landing gear. The IAR-99 is subsonic, with a maximum speed of about 538 mph (≈ 865 km/h; ≈ 467 kt) and a service ceiling near 42,323 ft (≈ 12,900 m). The IAR-99 entered serial production in 1987. By the end of the communist era, 28 airframes (serials S-001, S-002, S-003/7003 and 701–725) had rolled out of the Craiova Aircraft Factory. Most were assigned to Boboc Flight School, where they progressively replaced the L-29 and L-39 ZA in the training inventory. The type proved reliable and became a trusted training platform for successive generations of Romanian aircrew.

IAR-99 – CONFIGURATION AND TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES

The IAR-99 airframe features a semi-monocoque fuselage, a low, trapezoidal wing, and two tandem cockpits. Both crew stations are equipped with Aerofina SC.HV-00 ejection seats (originally Martin-Baker MK.RU-10J/LB), certified for zero/zero rescue (capable of safe ejection at H = 0, V = 0). Propulsion is provided by the Viper 632-41 turbojet, which supports the aircraft across its certified flight envelope. Fuel is carried in internal tanks and in optional underwing drop tanks; standard internal range is approximately 594 NM (≈ 684 mi; 1,100 km). The platform has five external hardpoints – one ventral centerline station and two underwing stations on each side – rated for a total external stores load of roughly 3,086 lb (≈ 1,400 kg). Hardpoints can carry practice and live ordnance, external fuel tanks, mission pods, and other stores. While the type has no fixed internal gun, a fuselage gun pod mounting a GSh-23L 23 mm cannon (200-round feed) can be fitted for weapons training or light-strike missions.

Performance is modest by modern NATO fighter and light-attack standards: maximum speed about Mach 0.76 (≈ 538 mph; ≈ 865 km/h), service ceiling roughly 42,323 ft (≈ 12,900 m), and an initial climb rate on the order of 6,890 ft/min (≈ 35 m/s). At the time of its design, these characteristics met the requirements for advanced jet training, lead-in fighter training, and limited ground-attack roles. Against contemporary multirole combat aircraft and current interoperability expectations, the IAR-99's raw performance and payload capacity are limited.

SUCCESSIVE MODERNIZATIONS: ȘOIM (FALCON) AND SM

With strategic and technological shifts in the 1990s, the Romanian aerospace sector launched an avionics upgrade program for the IAR-99 fleet. In 1996–1997, in partnership with Israel's ELBIT Systems, engineers developed the **Șoim** standard (Falcon). Thirteen aircraft (tail numbers 709, 711–713, and 717–725) received upgraded cockpits, enhanced training suites, and warning/protection systems against air-to-air and surface-to-air threats (infrared and radar). Cockpit modernization introduced multifunction displays (MFDs) and integrated a DASH helmet-mounted display. The avionics package was compatible with the MiG-21 LanceR systems and enabled the integration of Western-origin weapons. The first IAR-99 Șoim flew in May 1997; by the early 2000s twelve aircraft (seven newly built and five modernized) had entered service. The upgraded fleet formed a dedicated Șoim squadron to prepare pilots for transition to the MiG-21 LanceR. Boboc Flight School operated the two variants in separate squadrons: the modernized IAR-99 Șoim and the non-modernized IAR-99 Standard.

Beginning in 2020, Romania advanced a new modernization under the designation **IAR-99 SM** (Modernized Standard). A contract signed in May 2020 with Avioane Craiova called for upgrading ten Standard airframes. The first IAR-99 SM (tail number 715) was unveiled on December 22, 2023, featuring a paint scheme aligned with the Romanian Air Force's F-16 multirole fighters (in service since September 2016). The original delivery plan – one aircraft in 2022 and all ten by 2024 – was delayed by COVID-19 and supply-chain disruptions. Flight testing of the first SM aircraft began in December 2023; by January 2025 the remaining nine airframes were in various stages of overhaul and modernization. A separate 2022 agreement covered revitalization of ten IAR-99 Șoim aircraft. Of the 28 aircraft originally produced, 21 were operational before these renewal programs began.

Prototype S-001 made its maiden flight on December 21, 1985

The SM standard brings modern training and mission-support capabilities. The cockpit is fully digital, featuring a HUD, modern MFDs aligned with F-16 avionics logic, a HOTAS (Hands-On Throttle-And-Stick) configuration, and an Embedded Virtual Avionics System (EVAS) for mission simulation and procedural training. Upgraded navigation (GPS/INS) and a NATO-standard IFF transponder enhance situational awareness and allied interoperability. The electronic protection suite includes a Radar Warning Receiver (RWR), an Electronic Countermeasures (ECM) module, and dispensers for chaff and flares.

The SM retains the license-built Viper engine from Turbomecanica; the modernization emphasizes digital avionics, structural revitalization, and life-extension rather than replacing the propulsion system.

The modernization program combines domestic and international cooperation. Avioane Craiova leads the SM effort with ELBIT Systems (avionics and EVAS), INCAS (design and integration), Turbomecanica (Viper engine support), and the CCIIZ - Center for Research, Innovation and Flight Testing (evaluation and certification). Romania's investment in the IAR-99 upgrade aims to

extend fleet life by 10–15 years and ensure Romanian Air Force pilots have access to training and familiarization systems aligned with NATO standards – particularly ahead of planned fifth-generation integrations.

OPERATIONAL PARAMETERS AND TECHNICAL-TACTICAL RELEVANCE – IAR-99 SM

Four decades after its maiden flight, the IAR-99 remains the Romanian Air Force's primary advanced jet trainer. The SM modernization turns the type into a high-tech training platform: aircrew train on procedures and systems that mirror those on the supersonic F-16 – capability that the 1980s Standard variant could not provide. With modern avionics and weapons interfaces, the SM can perform effective close air support and reconnaissance, and it is capable of limited tactical-strike employment using contemporary munitions (bombs and precision-guided weapons).

Design constraints remain: the IAR-99 is a subsonic platform whose flight and maneuvering performance exceed 1960s-era jet trainers but are outclassed by modern transonic and supersonic lead-in and advanced trainers (e.g., Leonardo M-346, KAI T-50). The IAR-99 SM is not intended to replace next-generation combat aircraft. Rather, it provides an economical and realistic lead-in to F-16 and fifth-generation multirole fighter aircraft training, delivering procedural and systems experience at significantly lower operating cost. Within the Romanian force structure the IAR-99 SM is positioned as an efficient, cost-effective "lead-in fighter trainer" with largely national maintenance and logistics support.

June 1999: displayed beside the French Ariane launch vehicle, the IAR-99 Șoim (exhibit number 361) highlighted Romania's presence at the Le Bourget Air Show

October 1999: the IAR-99 Șoim took center stage at EXPOMIL (the first edition of the international military technology exhibition held in Romania), displayed with a full range of armament configurations

Former prototype S-003 – re-registered 7003 – was transformed into the IAR-109 Swift demonstrator, shown here at Romanian International Air Show in July 2006

OPERATIONAL SAFETY AND LESSONS LEARNED

The IAR-99's operational history includes accidents and losses, which underline the importance of stringent maintenance regimes and rigorous aircrew training. Today's fleet benefits from multiple safety systems and comprehensive test and inspection protocols, but each serious mishap reinforces the need for robust maintenance manuals, disciplined inspection practices, and realistic emergency-procedure training. These lessons have been institutionalized across Romanian Air Force units: methodical preflight checks, regular emergency-procedure drills, and continuous upgrades to survival and safety equipment remain priorities.

IAR-99 SM – A MODERNIZATION THAT KEEPS A ROMANIAN AIRCRAFT RELEVANT

The IAR-99 is an emblem of Romania's aeronautical industry. Designed domestically, produced in Craiova, and progressively outfitted with newer technologies, the type has evolved from a subsonic trainer into a platform with NATO-compatible avionics and weapons interfaces. The SM upgrade reinforces that role by combining relatively low national operating and maintenance costs with modern systems – HUD, MFDs, EVAS, upgraded communications, and NATO-standard RWR/ECM and IFF. Although the original airframe imposes physical limits, the SM delivers student pilots a training environment that closely replicates combat conditions.

Through successive modernization efforts the IAR-99 has proven adaptable: it does not supplant the supersonic F-16 or future fighters, but it provides essential intermediate training for Romanian pilots and offers a national-logistics-supported light air-support capability. Continued program funding, expanded domestic industrial participation, and maintenance of strict reliability and training standards are essential to keep the type flying safely and effectively for decades to come.

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The IAR-99 is more than an aircraft – it is a testament to the rigor and inventiveness of a national industry that perseveres. From INCAS and Avioane Craiova engineers to Turbomecanica technicians and the aircrews who have flown it, the IAR-99's story is one of persistence. The Romanian "Falcon" remains a bridge between established technical tradition and tomorrow's fifth-generation aviation – a wing that will not tire soon.

Adrian Sultănoiu,
with the support of specialists from the Center for Research, Innovation, and Flight Testing
Photo courtesy of Center for Research, Innovation, and Flight Testing

IAR-99 SM

Falcon Strike 2025

The third edition of the most sophisticated "live" exercise organized by the Italian Air Force took place from November 3 to 14, once again centered on the Apulian base of Amendola, home of the 32nd Wing. In this iteration–attended by over 1,000 military personnel and more than 50 aircraft from Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Greece–the usual key concepts of "Interoperability" and "Multi-Domain Operations" were joined forcefully by the concept of "Deterrence."

Story by Gian Carlo Vecchi și Sergio Lanna
Photis by Gian Carlo Vecchi, Sergio Lanna și Pier Paolo Lazzarin

"The comparison between different generations (4th and 5th) looking together toward the future"

Since the last edition of "Falcon Strike," held from November 14 to 25, 2022, much has changed. The increasingly unstable international geopolitical situation, with the continuation of the war in Ukraine–which in 2022 had begun only a few months earlier–and with growing threats along NATO's eastern flank, not to mention persistent instability on the Alliance's southern flank that has escalated into a humanitarian crisis, have substantially changed the paradigm of the exercise. Not so much in the substance of the missions, which for years have focused on specific types of operations, but certainly in the statements made by military representatives. At "Falcon Strike 25," there was explicit discussion of a "Peer Opponent" scenario, with missions focused on operations such as Counter A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial), ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance), TST (Time Sensitive Targeting), and Tactical Command and Control (Tactical C2).
Agile Combat Employment (ACE), as in the previous editions of 2021 and 2022, was again one of the areas of focus, with "Cross-Servicing" and "Rapid Refueling" activities made possible specifically by the F-35 line.

"Falcon Strike," created in 2021 as a training event specifically for 5th-generation assets, adopted in this edition a format more closely aligned with the Alliance's current training needs, whose combat forces consist of a mix of different generations of aircraft. Thus, during the first week, COMAO and Shadow Wave missions focused on integrating 4th- and 5th-generation assets through daytime and afternoon missions. During the second week, missions were dedicated exclusively to 5th-generation assets, with predominantly nighttime flight activities.

If we exclude the presence of the Aviano F-16Cs in 2021–likely a prerequisite for U.S. participation–this is the first time that 4th-generation assets from Allied Forces have taken part in "Falcon Strike," including Rafale F4s from the French Air and Space Force, F-16V Block 72s from the Hellenic Air Force, and AV-8B Harrier IIs from the Italian Navy, integrated into the Blue Force directly from Amendola Air Base.
As for 5th-generation assets, the exercise included the participation of F-35A and B aircraft from the Italian Air Force's 32nd Wing, F-35As from the 6th Wing, F-35As from the U.S. Air Force 48th Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath–regular participants at Falcon Strike–F-35Bs from the Italian Navy's GRUPAER, and finally F-35Bs from the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike Group, operating directly from HMS Prince of Wales in the Mediterranean. Notably, during the exercise, a Royal Navy press release announced that the Prince of Wales had embarked the largest number of F-35Bs ever–24 aircraft.
In general, each nation flew 75% of its missions as "Blue Force" and 25% as "Red Force." Naturally, the Italian Air Force made a major contribution, employing nearly all available assets, mostly operating from their home bases. Only the SPYDR aircraft was temporarily deployed to Amendola during our visit.

Equally essential to the exercise's objectives were the electronic systems, radars and EW suites, Mirach drones, and SAM assets–real or simulated–available within the Salto di Quirra Joint Test Range (PISQ), which recreated an "A2/AD Bubble" to train SEAD capabilities considered fundamental in a hypothetical "Peer-to-Peer" conflict.

DETERRENCE

In a recent interview with Rivista Aeronautica, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force stated: "…without the F-35 our level of deterrence would be lower. With the F-35 we represent a serious problem for any potential aggressor. This is why it is essential to continue developing this capability, both in terms of potential and in terms of numbers."
The Italian Air Force currently has five operational flight groups equipped with 5th-generation aircraft:
– the 156th OCU Group deployed at the Pilot Training Center at Luke AFB in Arizona;
– the 102nd and 154th Groups based at Ghedi with the 6th Wing;
– the 13th and 101st Groups based at Amendola with the 32nd Wing.
From our sources, approximately 35 aircraft have been delivered to the Air Force so far, including the two F-35Bs assigned to the 101st Group. Six F-35Bs are assigned to the Navy's GRUPAER. Overall, Italy is committed to purchasing 75 F-35As and F-35Bs (20 for the Air Force and 20 for the Navy).
Considering that a significant portion of aircraft are based in the United States, the project to establish the first F-35 training center outside the U.S. Trapani Air Base stems not only from obvious national prestige but from concrete operational needs–namely, having all available aircraft on hand for potential national defense requirements. This need is likely shared by other European air forces equipped with, or planning to equip themselves with, the F-35.

AN EXERCISE LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

While "Falcon Strike" was underway, the 25th edition of the International Fighter Conference (IFC) was held in Rome for the first time in Italy. The event–organized by Defence IQ with the support of the Italian Air Force–is one of the most important international venues for analyzing strategic developments in aerospace power.
Among the scheduled speakers was the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force, Air Squadron General Giovanni Balestri, with a presentation titled "Demonstrating the F-35 fleet's Joint Air Power capabilities and growing proficiency with large-scale and international exercises."

"Operating together," stated the Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force, Air Squadron General Antonio Conserva, ***"has always been the strength of the Atlantic Alliance, which for over seventy years has ensured the defense of Europe. Using fifth-generation assets is fundamental because they can process vast amounts of information, remain stealthy thanks to low observability, and therefore increase both our defensive capabilities and our ability to present ourselves as united–thus ensuring a deterrent effect against potential adversaries. Today we have seen many assets–over 50 aircraft involved. We also have colleagues from the Italian Navy, who also fly the F-35, and with whom we operate in unison. And also American, French, Greek, and British assets. This is truly a moment in which we demonstrate that we are able to train together, and also operate together, with a very high degree of readiness. I believe this is the most important message of this exercise: Italian defense is ready, we are united with our partners, and we are fully capable of ensuring the defense of NATO territory."***

The General stated that the level of defense is no longer defined by individual platforms, but by the ability to integrate domains and transform data into strategic cognitive and decision-making advantage. Operational superiority has shifted from the mere control of physical airspace to the control of the decision-making space. In this regard, he explicitly referred to the "Falcon Strike 2025" exercise simultaneously underway at the 32nd Wing in Amendola.
The exercise, focused also on improving the operational capabilities of 5th-generation fighters in a joint, multinational and multi-domain context, served as a "testing ground" for the integration of the Air, Sea, Land and Cyber domains with Decision Superiority. "The optimization of data flow and Command and Control (C2) management in high-density scenarios, as planned in Falcon Strike 2025, makes the exercise a fundamental laboratory for the data-driven operational concepts that will form the backbone of the GCAP future Combat Cloud."

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FS 2025, conducted by the Italian Air Force, concluded with over 1,000 military personnel involved, more than 50 aircraft deployed, approximately 460 sorties, and more than 1,000 flight hours logged in two weeks of operations, from November 3rd to 14th.
Undoubtedly, the primary (but not only) objective was to achieve maximum integration between fourth- and fifth-generation aircraft and maximum interoperability between crews from different NATO nations.

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Dassault Rafale from the French Air and Space Force

F-16V Block 72 from the Hellenic Air Force

AV-8B Harrier II from the Italian Navy from Amendola Air Base

F-35A from the USAF from 48th Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath

MISSION STRESS MANAGEMENT - THE CALM THAT KEEPS THE TEAM OPERATIONAL

By Captain (Psychologist) Georgiana Zonea

"Feeling stress doesn't mean you're weak – it means you're human."

Stress is a constant in military life. For professionals in uniform, missions demand a difficult blend of sustained vigilance, rapid decision-making, and adaptation to the unknown – and the way each person manages that pressure often determines mission failure or mission success. This isn't about simply removing an unpleasant feeling; it's about the tools that convert that feeling into operationally useful resources.

The body's response is immediate and clear: muscles tighten, breathing speeds up, sleep quality drops. Because of that, basic measures are your first line of defense. Tactical breathing – slow, deep inhales followed by controlled exhales – brings heart rate down to a level that allows clear judgment. Regular physical activity, sufficient sleep, and sound nutrition are not optional; they replenish energy stores and preserve decision-making capacity under stress.

"A calm leader is the team's psychological anchor."

Missions also trigger strong emotions: fear, anger, longing, guilt. Suppressing or denying those emotions quickly weakens unit cohesion and effectiveness. Controlled, candid dialogue among teammates, the judicious use of humor as a pressure-release, and small personal rituals – writing in a journal, listening to a favorite track, sending a short message home – act like relief valves that prevent dangerous tension from building. Naming and discussing emotions is not a sign of weakness; it's professionalism.

"Resilience is trained, just like physical fitness."

Cognitive framing shapes the stress response as much as body and emotion do. Catastrophic interpretations amplify tension, while focusing on controllable elements conserves mental resources. Training to manage thoughts – converting pessimistic assumptions into realistic assessments – lowers anxiety and speeds sound decision-making. Accepting the limits of a situation and orienting toward concrete actions are core practices of cognitive resilience.

Mission stress is also collective. Units that communicate honestly, acknowledge members' vulnerabilities, and practice solidarity endure pressure far better. Leaders play a decisive role: their tone, calm, and empathy are not mere gestures – they are tools that influence morale and performance. A leader who recognizes fatigue and stays present with subordinates becomes a psychological anchor; that anchor produces operational cohesion.

Reentry from a mission requires specific attention. Transitioning from heightened alert to routine can be abrupt and destabilizing; reintegration takes time, dialogue, and sometimes specialized support. Talking about experiences, turning trauma into lessons learned, and seeking help when signs of stress persist are normal, necessary steps toward recovery. Resilience is not the denial of suffering – it is the ability to integrate it and use it to become more effective.

Stress management is trained like any other military skill: through repetition, discipline, and mutual support. Under the uniform is a person with emotions, thoughts, and limits – and the real strength of the modern warfighter lies in the psychological balance that lets them weather the storm of the mission and return fit for the next task.

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IAR-99 - THE EVOLUTION OF A SYMBOL