

after joining NATO in 2004, from the first day, the Romanian Air Force began performing air policing missions under NATO command. It is true that we started with our own aircraft under command of the Romanian MAOC, in full compliance with NATO from the technical, procedural and personnel training perspective. This was the opinion of the NATO evaluation team from CC Air HQ Izmir and other teams that assessed our readiness, including the team led by General Hobbins from CC Air HQ Ramstein, your Director. However, there was no need for a transition period to implement NATO standards in the Romanian Air Force due to our intense preparation prior to joining NATO. The day we entered NATO, we began using NATO's air policing procedures immediately.

How have the people adjusted to NATO?

Quickly. For a long time, they were facing west. Then came the Partnership for Peace period, beginning in 1994 with Romania being the first nation to sign up, a period highlighted by our participation in many NATO and bilateral exercises. The Romanian Air Force has been out in front of the Romanian Army & Navy personnel - while they were talking about NATO, our pilots and aircrew were taking part in common exercises with NATO Airmen.

So your Air Force took a leading role within Romania's military to become a full NATO partner?

It's not easy for the others to accept, but it's true.

Looking to the future, how are NATO's transformational goals

impacting the Romanian Air Force?

Projecting our Air Force into the future, based on NATO's guidance, we quickly changed our approach to training, we changed our force structure and, regarding our Air Force's future acquisition programmes, our goal is to be aligned with the Alliance's requirements. We are looking forward to the acquisition of a multirole combat aircraft, able to perform from the outset inside NATO operations, having avoided from the beginning a Russian solution. We are finalising the upgrade to our Air C2 system in 2008, fully compliant with NATO standards. We have acquired new air defence radars, all NATO compliant. We have a short-range air defence system acquisition, sourced from NATO, and looking to 2010 and beyond, we can talk about a long-range surface-to-air missile system acquisition. We are trying hard to implement NATO's transformational goals into our transformational projects. We aim to keep everything deployable, particularly aircraft and short range missiles, because this is a NATO requirement.

Continuing with the theme of remaining relevant, could you tell us your views on developing the people of the Romanian Air Force to take on their challenging roles?

Our personnel understood quickly that we needed to conform to new rules. It was not easy at all. We had to send all our people to different training courses because I did not want to create a new philosophy but rather comply with NATO's philosophy. In all branches of the Air Force, we used all the personnel training opportunities offered by different partners. I am not against those who are old and want to leave the system because it is well known that the younger generation adapts much faster to the new rules. This is the moment. It is not easy at all - talking about social aspects and financial aspects - but we have to do this, the modification needs to be done!

How has the recruiting system had to adjust as a result of the newer generation?

As you probably know, we no longer have mandatory military service. We have only professionals,

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IAR-330 Socat helicopters.