

# PROMOTING THE MILITARY PROFESSION, FUNDAMENTAL FACTOR IN HUMAN RESOURCE RECRUITMENT FOR THE ROMANIAN AIR FORCE

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**Abstract:** *For the Romanian Air Force, the promotion of the military profession, recruitment, selection, initial training, as well as the training of aeronautical personnel represents the most complex and laborious activity, since reaching the operational level requires going through the algorithm of a process that is characterized by a relatively long duration of training, impressive costs and, last but not least, risks specific to the aeronautical environment.*

*The trajectory of this process has as its starting point the recruitment and selection of candidates for admission to the higher and post-secondary military institutions of the Air Force, specialized in the training of specialists in military aeronautics. The final point of this path is the combat unit, where the training of the aeronautical personnel takes the form of specialization for the technique served and the achievement of the performance indices that give it the status of operational aeronautical personnel.*

*The finality of this process is realized in the achievement of the fundamental objective for the Romanian Air Force - the provision of large units and air units with well-trained aeronautical personnel, capable of performing the entire range of aeronautical activities, which can only be achieved through the quality of staged training formative-instructive algorithm.*

**Keywords:** *Air Force, human resource, military profession, promoting, educational offer, promoting campaign for the military profession, recruiting, secelection.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is unanimously recognized that the human resource is the most important resource in the economy of any organization, even the military institution, and its attraction is a complex, laborious process, with strategic valences for the organization, which requires the allocation of resources, but also specialized personnel in the promotion and recruitment process.

*„What is an organization without its employees? It is nothing in the absence of human resources, possibly a lot of expensive equipment”[11]*

Therefore, the human resource is unique but, at the same time, the human resource is unpredictable, uncertain, risky. In a word: imperfect.

In the organizational culture, it is considered that human resources are the first strategic resources of an organization, being regarded as one of its most important values, and among the strategic objectives of the organization is also that of attracting the necessary human resources, both to ensure its operation as well as its development.

In this context, human resources management has a decisive role in the process of attracting quality human resources, which can contribute to increasing competitiveness

and ensuring a stable future for the organization, as well as for harmonizing the interests of individuals with its objectives.

The causes of this constant and accelerated reduction of the selection base are multiple, and the factors that influence their appearance or development are mainly external to the military system, difficult to anticipate and almost impossible to control. As an example, the increase in the offers of other employers on the labor market, often tempting and accessible and in line with the aspirations of young generations, can no longer be compensated by a corresponding increase in the benefits granted to young people by the military system, so that, they very easily turn to other fields (careers), which do not involve great personal sacrifices, prohibitions and major incompatibilities like those specific to the military system, without the existence of appropriate compensation measures.

Analyzing the constant downward trend in the number of candidates for the military educational institutions of the Air Force, respectively the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy and the "Traian Vuia" Air Force Military Warrant and Non-Commissioned Officer Military School, more significant for the latter, especially since 2016, when the number of candidates who reached the exam phase was sub-unit compared to the years 1990-2000, when the number of candidates was 5-7 per place open to competition, with some variations, the decision was made that the promotion the military profession and the educational offer of the Air Force to constitute one of the priority objectives for the management of human resources in the Air Force.

The activity of promoting the military profession is therefore a basic element of the recruitment of human resources, has strategic valences and is part of the general effort to ensure a constant and sufficient flow of candidates with an appropriate aptitude-motivational profile for the military education institutions of the Air Force Romanians, the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy and the "Traian Vuia" Military School of Military Majors and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Air Force.

## **2. THE MILITARY PROFESSION – SOCIAL VALUE**

Being a soldier is a way of life, in which rigorous spirit, dynamic temperament, capacity for sacrifice, passion, strength of character, harmonious physical development and capacity for effort are intertwined. The military profession does not only mean military maneuvers, exercises and training.

There are a multitude of military specialties that require numerous skills, beyond those specific to combatants. Many of them have equivalents in civilian life and ensure the transfer of skills from and to other occupations.

A successful military career begins in an environment of discipline, military values and norms. Young people who embrace the military career must be characterized by will, determination, competitiveness, effective and affective engagement, intellectual curiosity and a desire to work in a team.

The military profession is a vocation and must be done out of passion. Determination, involvement, the courage to support your ideas will lead to success in your military career.

Military personnel frequently move to where their professional skills are needed, in the country or abroad. Mobility is one of the characteristics of this profession.

However, professional soldiers have, in addition to responsibilities, rights that they benefit from. In addition to a guaranteed income, which increases according to career development, military personnel have the right to free equipment, monthly compensation for food, the right to service housing or a monthly amount for rent, the right to medicines

and medical assistance, to holidays and permits, to rest facilities and recovery of work capacity, to compensate the expenses of travel to the family when they carry out their activity in other localities than the ones where they live. There are also other rights, compensations or facilities that the military can benefit from, depending on the professional and social situation of each one[18].

### **2.1 Promoting the military profession. General context**

A particularly important event for our country and, implicitly, for the Romanian Army, was the signing, on April 4, 2004, of the accession treaty to the North Atlantic Alliance, Romania becoming a full member after the ratification of the treaty by The Romanian Parliament.

*The North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (N.A.T.O.) [19] is a political-military alliance made up of 31 states from Europe and North America that have adhered to its values. The essential purpose of N.A.T.O. is to ensure the freedom and security of all its members through political and military means, in accordance with the provisions of *the North Atlantic Treaty* and the principles of the United Nations Charter. *The North Atlantic Treaty* was signed on April 4, 1949 in Washington DC, represents the legal and contractual basis of the Alliance and was established based on Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which affirms the inalienable right of independent states to individual or collective defense.

After Romania's full accession to N.A.T.O., the Romanian Army was subjected to a complex and long process of transformation, restructuring and modernization, with the defined purpose of adapting and integrating the institution to the new historical realities.

In this complex process of transformation and adaptation of the Romanian Army to the new historical realities, an essential element was the restructuring and transformation of the human resources management system into a system compatible with the existing systems within the alliance, flexible, dynamic, adaptable but and predictable for career soldiers.

Thus, since 2001, new regulations in the field of human resources have been adopted and new concepts have been implemented, such as military career, military career development [3], continuous training, as well as new approaches to the recruitment and selection of human resources.

Regarding the promotion of the military profession, the main effort was focused on two main directions of action, namely on the quantitative and qualitative recruitment of human resources - the processes of promotion of the military profession, recruitment and selection of candidates, as well as on initial and continuous training of military personnel, these being defining elements of the new approach.

From this perspective, the promotion of the military profession and the recruitment of candidates for military educational institutions, fit from a medical, mental and motor perspective and with a thorough education, was and is a central element and a constant concern for the decision-makers of the human resources management system in Romanian Army.

### **2.2 Motivation to choose the military profession**

It is unanimously recognized that, in the choice of any profession, there are determining factors that are likely to substantiate a young person's decision to choose a certain profession over another, such as: salary level, working conditions, work schedule, working environment which activates the organization, the relations between employees, as well as the benefits related to the profession (ensuring professional development, granting bonuses and benefits, medical insurance, recreational packages, etc.).

In terms of choosing a military career, the defining elements could be: free education, a guaranteed job upon completion of undergraduate or post-secondary university studies,

a guaranteed and progressive income, a predictable career progression that provides a clear perspective on the future, as well as some material advantages associated with the military profession (compensation for rent payment or mortgage payment, as the case may be, free equipment, transport settlement, free medical assistance, etc.). With all these advantages offered by the military institution to young people who want to follow a military career, when choosing a profession they also consider the risks associated with this very specialized profession, such as: the incompatibilities and prohibitions imposed on military personnel by law, the risks associated in crisis situations or war, reduced systemic flexibility, strict military hierarchy, elements that can change the option.

So, we may consider that the options and behaviors of people in choosing a profession depend to the greatest extent on the motivational factors, but also on the implicit risks and compensations offered.

The studies carried out on the motivation of students and pupils from military educational institutions in choosing the military profession highlighted the fact that the main reasons behind the choice of the military profession were those related to the characteristics of socio-economic life, rather than the professional ones. Thus, the listed reasons were: job security, salary, gaining independence from parents. Of course, essential elements have also been identified that leave their mark on the option of the military profession: the aspiration to become a professional soldier for a young man can be considered a progress in his development, the relatively stable nature of the aspiration is a positive element that must be taken into account, the material advantages as the main motivation in choosing the profession, the pecuniary criterion is the second in the hierarchy, the first being represented by the social status.

The material stimulation of the military, as well as emphasizing their special status and the importance of their activity, are motivating elements that would ensure both the success of the selection through a larger selection base and the subsequent professional performances.

### **3. THE MILITARY PROFESSION PROMOTION CAMPAIGNS CARRIED OUT BY THE SPECIALIZED STRUCTURES OF THE ROMANIAN AIR FORCE**

The disappearance of the myth of job security and the awareness of the current risks of the military profession have made today's young people more pragmatic, better informed about the world they live in and more determined in choosing their profession. However, the military profession and career offer many reasons to be chosen by young people, considering some advantages, which distinguish it from civilian professions. It is not to be neglected that attending a military educational institution ensures a job after graduation, to which is added the security of the profession and the evolution in the military career according to the capacities, real possibilities and own options. As far as social life is concerned, after placement, the graduates benefit from secure incomes and facilities for the family, as well as opportunities to assert themselves in fields related to the military field.

#### **3.1 Purpose and objectives**

The attractiveness of the military profession is an indicator of the way in which the army reacts and adapts to the conditions of a strong competitive environment that characterizes the market of educational and professional offers. The downward trend in the attractiveness of the military career among young people, which manifests itself nationally, indicated the need to develop strategies to promote the military profession that take into account, on the one hand, the developments on the labor market, the size and characteristics of the groups target, and on the other hand, the changes produced in the

structure of the armed forces, as well as the impact of the new military technologies recently introduced into the army's equipment.

In order to promote the military profession in an integrated and unitary way at the level of the entire army, strategies for the promotion of the military profession were developed for the period 2016-2020, respectively 2021-2025, with the aim of supporting the recruitment of human resources through proactive, modern methods, with impact on target groups.

The campaigns to promote the military profession and the educational offer carried out by the General Staff of the Air Force in the period 2018-2023, had as their **main purpose** the support of the recruitment process of quality human resources, necessary for the full occupation of the places put out for competition in the military institutions of education from the Air Force, provided in the schooling plans and the direct presentation to the target group (students in the final years of high school), the educational offer of the military educational institutions of the Air Force, respectively the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy and the Military School of Military Warrant and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Air Force "Traian Vuia".

At a secondary level, indirectly, through promotion campaigns, the image of the Romanian Army, in general, and of the Air Force, in particular, was promoted and projected in the civilian environment, as well as the current and perspective concerns of the military institution.

Also, the systematic and coherent dissemination of information and messages in the civilian environment was considered, in order to maximize the perception of the audience groups on the military profession and determine their option for the military career.

The carried out campaigns were characterized by national coverage, own visual identity, the diversity of means of communication with the target audience, the convergence of messages, by consistency and transparency in the provision of objective and relevant information regarding the educational offer of the Air Force.

**The objectives** of the promotion campaigns of the educational offer of the military education institutions of the Air Force were similar to the objectives established by the strategies for the promotion of the military profession, respectively: ensuring a consistent flow of candidates who opt for the military career, with an aptitude-motivational profile suitable to the requirements a military career in the Air Force as aeronautical personnel; increasing the share of young people in their final years and in their first professional option who request enrollment in the selection process; ensuring the sufficient number of candidates for personnel categories, weapons/services and military specialties specific to aeronautical personnel; increasing the degree of correct, timely and transparent information of potential candidates regarding the educational offer; gaining the support of the support group, especially the families of the potential candidates and the teachers involved in the professional guidance of the students.

Also, for the transmission of messages among young people during the campaigns to promote the military profession and the educational offer of the Air Force, in addition to direct interpersonal communication with potential candidates, the advantages of the online communication environment were used, the preferred medium for the transmission messages and their capture among young people.

Promotional efforts have focused on the target group of potential candidates in their final years of high school, which can make it possible to target the message to other segments of the target group they belong to.

### **3.2 Conduct of campaigns for the promotion of the military profession**

The Air Force Staff, through the Personnel and Mobilization Office, assumed the role of initiator, integrator and coordinator of the campaigns to promote the educational offer of the military educational institutions of the Air Force.

In order to give the necessary consistency to this ambitious project, representatives of the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy and the "Traian Vuia" Air Force Majors and Non-Commissioned Officers Military School were invited and participated in these promotion activities, respectively students, students, teachers, instructors, as well as representatives from the military units-aeronautical personnel, military cadres from the military units deployed in the areas where the promotion activities were carried out. A complete team to introduce young people to what a military career in the Air Force is all about.

Also, the representatives of the regional and county military centers were involved and participated in the promotion campaigns, in the structure of which the information and recruitment offices operate, structures of the army specialized in the recruitment of potential candidates, but also in activities to promote the military profession. They, together with the representatives of the school inspectorates, determined the places for promotion activities, as well as the participants. Depending on the established place and the local possibilities for the direct promotion activity, they were requested to ensure the presence of the target group, respectively students of the XIth and XIIth classes, but also other people interested in the military career.

In order for such a promotion campaign to be successful among young people, to be visible in the public space and to generate the desired effects, promotion and advertising played a very important role.

The principles that were the basis of the campaign to promote the military profession were coherence, convergence, flexibility, proactivity, transparency, continuity, neutrality of messages, national coverage and efficiency.

The advertising campaign design strategies used consisted of: informative actions with the local and national media; actions specific to the advertising campaign; public relations actions.

Channels for broadcasting actions and promotional products used in the campaigns were: social networks, widely used by young people - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter; press (daily/periodical, national/local); the radio, which has as its main advantage the selectivity of the audience in a differentiated way depending on the day, the time of transmission and the show; the television; transmission of the promotional activity at peak audience times within the news programs. They proved to be of maximum effectiveness as a type of promotion: promotional films, printed leaflets, brochures, promotional gifts and other non-conventional means (pens, t-shirts, badges, military accessories).

The central message of the promotion campaign focused on the statement: *The Air Force offers you a job, a career, a decent income, social protection, the possibility of affirmation and promotion based on performance criteria, social prestige. Instead, it requires professional competence, capacity for self-improvement, loyalty, fairness, discipline, physical and mental strength, the ability to take risks.*

The participants in the promotion activities had the opportunity to come into direct contact with the students and pupils from the military educational institutions, with fighter and transport pilots from the Air Force, but also with some of their equipment. They held discussions and exchanged views on military careers, and the results of these actions were visible and positive.

At the end of each presentation of the educational offer, demonstration flights were performed with military combat and transport aircraft from the Air Force equipment, a

moment highly appreciated by young people and assistance, with a major impact on their decisions.

### **3.3 Analysis of the results of promotion campaigns**

The results or effects of the campaigns to promote the military profession carried out by the Air Force in the period 2018-2024, must be analyzed both from the perspective of achieving the general objectives established, in relation to the audience groups, but also from the point of view of the positive image effect obtained at the level local and national for the Romanian Air Force and Army.

For the first aspect, the feed-back was easier and faster to observe, the assistance present at the promotional activities being impressed by the way it was carried out. For the second aspect, the periodic survey of public opinion is the most relevant tool.

Starting with March 2018, the Air Force carried out extensive campaigns at the national level to promote the military career and the educational offer of its own military education institutions, and the results were visible through the significant increase in the number of people who requested information from the offices information-recruitment regarding a military career in the Air Force, the number of people who requested information via the Internet, the number of accesses to the website dedicated to recruitment, the total number of candidates recruited for the military profession, the number of requests for information, interviews, reports from the media side, the number of positive reports appearing in the media about the professional offer of the Ministry of National Defense, the recruitment and selection procedures, the working and living conditions of the military, as well as the number of requests received by the Air Force from various institutions /organizations, in order to participate in local or national events.

Following the post-campaign analysis, it was observed that the number of candidates/place for admission increased considerably in the period following their implementation. According to a study carried out at the level of Air Force Staff in 2020, regarding the effects and results of the campaigns to promote the military profession among young people, carried out between March 2018 and February 2020 throughout the country, the percentage regarding the occupation of the places put up for competition from The "Traian Vuia" Military Majors and Non-Commissioned Officers Military School has increased the specialization of military majors from 38% to 65%, and for non-commissioned officers from 68% to 74% in the direct stream, respectively from 13% to 100% in the stream indirect training. Also, the percentage of occupation of the places open to competition at the "Henri Coandă" Braşov Air Force Academy increased, in the same period, from less than one candidate per place (subunit), to 3-4 candidates per place, the flow of entrances to military educational institutions in the Air Force being ensured.

It should also be mentioned that a very important element for the selection of candidates who opt for a career as a flight attendant in the Air Force consists in the medical-psychological selection carried out by the National Institute of Aeronautical and Space Medicine "General doctor aviator Victor Anastasiu".

Analyzing the promotion period of the last five years, it is found that the admissibility rate was approximately 18% (internal analyses). Statistical data indicate a relatively low percentage of admissions among graduates of national military colleges compared to graduates of civilian colleges.

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#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The complex processes of adapting the military system to the new Euro-Atlantic realities naturally generated the need to adapt the human resources management systems in the Romanian Army, and the transition from the army based on compulsory military service to the one based on volunteering, required the repositioning of the profession military on the labor market, especially in relation to the competition represented by the civilian environment, where the abundance and consistency of job offers are much more attractive and tempting for young people who are on their first professional option in life.

Also, the constant and continuous decrease in the number of candidates for military educational institutions caused by the previously presented realities required the assessment of the existing situation, the analysis of the causes and consequences in the short, medium and long term, not only for military education, but especially, for the future of the professionalized human resource in the army and the implementation of measures and actions likely to bring back the interest of young people in the military profession.

The campaigns to promote the military profession and the educational offer of the Air Force, respectively, the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy and the "Traian Vuia" Military School of Military Warrant and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Air Force, had as their main objective the attraction of future candidates for their own educational institutions and, secondarily, the promotion in civil society of the current and future concerns of the Air Force, as well as the public image of the institution.

The activities were also a good opportunity for networking between all actors involved in the process of recruiting young people for the military profession, the support group made up of teachers, students and military students, teachers and representatives of military educational institutions and military personnel of military units.

The campaigns to promote the military profession and the educational offer of the military educational institutions of the Air Force addressed in particular the target group consisting of high school/college students in their final years and had the role of helping young people to define their personal options regarding the professional career. In direct relation with the young high school students, the representatives of the military education institutions explained to them their personal journey, how they prepared for the selection tests (motor testing, psychological and medical evaluation), how to prepare for the entrance exam and how interesting and valued is the life of a military student.

Also, the high school students received direct information regarding the military career, opportunities, courses in the country and abroad, international missions in which they can participate, but also the benefits of choosing the military profession.

The areas where the campaigns to promote the educational offer were carried out were chosen taking into account scientific elements, namely, the low level of youth employment, the relatively high level of training of young high school students, the high demographic density (the corresponding selection pool), the interest manifested for the military profession by the young people of this area, very limited possibilities of employment for young people due to the lack of the appropriate economic and social environment.

Considering the fact that, in the current context, attracting future candidates for military educational institutions is a complex and arduous process, it is necessary for the Romanian Army in general and the Air Force in particular to continue the campaigns to promote the military profession constantly and continuously, in all social environments, a fact that will lead, sooner or later, to the expected result, namely the provision of the human resource so necessary for this institution, vital for the fulfillment of the assumed constitutional missions.



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