

**CONSCRIPTS vs. VOLUNTEER
SOLDIERS IN THE ROMANIAN
ARMY**

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While conscription has worked for the Romanian military throughout history and provided some advantages, the new direction and vision of the military can only be accomplished through an all-volunteer military.

Facts and vision

Conscription has enjoyed widespread acceptance in the past 50 years in Romania to sustain effective defense and labor forces. However, the long-awaited abolition of the conscript Army currently in process is designed to bring Bucharest into line with its new North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners. In its quest for membership of the alliance, which it joined last year, Romania undertook several reforms including radical cuts to the officer corps and an end to conscription. The armed forces have already downsized from 235,000 in 1994 to less than 100,000 and are expected to number only 75,000 by the end of next year. A decision made this year determined that the October 2006 generation of recruits would be the last to be called up. Beginning January 1, 2007, Romanian males with a minimum age of 20 will need to go to the military recruiting centers in order to register for service. The recruiting centers will be the sole registration format except in times of war when conscription would be reintroduced.

Criticism of Romanian conscription

Since the fall of Communism a decade and a half ago, the debate of conscription as a national policy has remained a controversial issue. The controversy is usually intense because it brings into conflict two fundamental principles of modern liberal democracies: *individual liberty* versus *duty to society*. In a free society where individual liberty is accorded the highest priority, compulsion to serve runs against the notion of individual freedom. Yet, it is also argued that while democracy promises freedom, freedom does not come without a price that must be paid to

maintain it. Subsequently, there lies a moral obligation in every citizen to contribute when called upon to protect this freedom. Another major debate of conscription is that it provides an ineffective force given the short duration of national service. It is often argued that conscript forces cannot match up to professional Soldiers in the battlefield. In addition, the demand on Soldiers has increased over the years. Besides basic combat skills, Soldiers now need to operate in a wider spectrum of missions from low to high intensity conflict. Soldiers need to be experienced, mature, and politically sensitive to handle operations in complex multinational coalition environments. Soldiers also need to be technically skilled and proficient in handling sophisticated equipment. The available training time for conscripts is simply too inadequate to justify a return of investment.

Why have conscript Soldiers in the Romanian Army?

Critics have commented that conscription provides an ineffective force. However, during both World Wars, Romanian conscripts proved indispensable. Romanian history shows that even a conscript army can be efficient. The strong will of survival and the well-tuned strategy of integrating conscripts to “fight as a system” of the Romanians have enhanced the effectiveness of the military force.

Conscription also helps with social bonding and national education. It helps to promote important citizen values and expose youths to different segments of society. In segmented and divided societies, this is especially important as bringing youths together for national service enables a closer understanding and cohesiveness among the different classes of society. It also aids the process of nation building as military service can have a profound effect of instilling patriotism and inculcating a sense of nationhood in its people. Youths generally leave national service not just physically stronger and mature, but also more aware about social cohesion and

patriotism. In addition, conscription helps to bring the military closer to the people. In modern democratic societies where a civilian-controlled military model is generally accepted as the ideal model, an improved civil-military relationship is especially beneficial.

Why have volunteer soldiers in the Romanian Army?

Motivation of conscripts has been a major problem. Volunteer Soldiers, serving by choice, have a strong natural motivation to perform. Conscripts, on the other hand, find it hard to find motivation, especially when there are no prospects of reward or promotion for the contributions. Poorly motivated conscripts may even produce a negative impact on the overall morale and capability of the Romanian Armed Forces.

The military reform aims to build up smaller, modern, flexible, expeditionary, and NATO interoperable armed forces, able to deter and counteract current threats to the security of Romania and its Allies. The Romanian mass conscription army will decrease in the near future, and there are three supporting reasons for this. Firstly, with the military transformation, the military division of labor has grown more complex and this demands an increasing professional expertise from the military personnel. Secondly, rapid technological advancements have led to dramatic impacts on military capabilities. Sophisticated technology has proven to be an effective force multiplier that can substitute physical Soldiers in the battlefield, thus negating the need for huge armies. Thirdly, opposition to compulsory military service has grown in Romania since the fall of communism.

Conscription used to be the answer, but in the future, the Romanian Armed Forces will be composed of only volunteer Soldiers that will have physical and mental toughness, competence and confidence, a high level of training, abundance of strategic knowledge, versatility, and discipline. The volunteer Soldiers will be prepared for living and leading in the 21st century.