

Panel 1 | Geopolitics of Defense

Context

The first edition of the forum, held on May 12, 2026, left three questions open for which there was no verifiable answer at the time: the solidity of US security guarantees, Romania's ability to turn European financing into its own industrial capability, and the practical substance of the strategic partnership with Ukraine. Between the two editions, each of these issues has developed sufficiently to allow for a discussion based on results.

The SAFE program has entered the implementation stage. The first tranche, amounting to EUR 2.5 billion, was disbursed in August 2026, following contracts worth more than EUR 5.6 billion signed at the end of May for combat vehicles, counter-drone systems and naval vessels. The Supreme Council of National Defense approved the procurement plan for 2027-2036, with a trajectory for increasing the defense budget to as much as 5% of GDP by 2035.

On the industrial front, the presence of international investors has become visible in production. Otokar acquired Automecanica Mediaș and delivered the first Cobra II vehicles manufactured entirely in Romania in July, with 216 units scheduled for this year. Hanwha Aerospace is building its first European factory in Petrești, while Rheinmetall, in partnership with Pirochim, is developing a propellant powder plant in Victoria valued at close to EUR 500 million. At the same time, the share of contracts awarded to domestic industry remains a matter of public debate, including comparisons with the Polish model of allocating contracts to domestic suppliers.

Within the alliance, the reconfiguration of responsibilities has continued. The US military presence in Romania has been reduced, while the US Embassy's public messaging has emphasized capabilities rather than troop numbers. The NATO Summit in Ankara formalized a greater allocation of responsibilities to European states, and Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye expanded their trilateral cooperation in the Black Sea from mine clearance to the protection of critical undersea infrastructure. The strategic partnership with Ukraine, signed in March, has remained the reference framework amid uneven progress in negotiations. Added to this was the resumption of hostilities between Israel and Iran in September, with effects on energy routes and the allocation of allied resources.

Proposed themes for the second edition

1. Deterrence amid the resizing of the US military presence

The discussion at the first edition focused on recalibrating the transatlantic relationship at the level of principles. The second edition can address the practical dimension: which capabilities, including air and missile defense, ammunition stocks, command and control, and infrastructure for receiving allied forces, must actually be available to make capability-based deterrence credible, within what time frames and with what national contribution.

2. Black Sea security and the protection of critical undersea infrastructure

The expansion of the Romania-Bulgaria-Türkiye trilateral group to protect undersea cables and pipelines is the first regional mechanism to achieve operational results through direct cooperation among littoral states. This theme proposes an assessment of the model: which components can be developed further, including maritime surveillance, protection of energy infrastructure and coordination with Ukraine, and what the format's current limitations are.

3. From European financing to national industrial capacity

The announced investments have entered the production phase, allowing the discussion to move from intentions to contractual terms: the actual level of technology transfer, maintenance and intellectual property rights, the integration of Romanian suppliers into production chains, and the training of a specialized workforce. This theme brings the contracting authority and international manufacturers operating in Romania into the same discussion.

4. Two active theaters and a single resource base

The resumption of the conflict between Israel and Iran directly affects the eastern flank through competition for political attention, ammunition production capacity and the security of energy routes. This theme provides a framework for interpreting the negotiations concerning Ukraine and the argument for maintaining the procurement schedule regardless of developments in the peace process.

Panel format

Opening keynote

H.E. Darryl Nirenberg, Ambassador of the United States of America: a 10-12-minute address before the panel takes the stage. The keynote sets the framework for the debate, and the proposition of capability-based deterrence becomes the working hypothesis that the panel examines over the following 75 minutes.

Panel

- H.E. Nicolas Warnery, Ambassador of the French Republic
- H.E. Özgür Kivanç Altan, Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye
- H.E. Hur Seung-chul, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea
- Prof. Vlad Nistor, PhD, Director General, Romanian Diplomatic Institute
- Representative of the Ministry of National Defense at State Secretary level
- Sedef Vehbi, Head of Military Cluster, Otokar
- Representative of Lockheed Martin Romania

The panel is designed for a maximum of seven guests to preserve its debate format. The structure established at the first edition is retained: The Panel, Rapid Fire, with questions submitted by the audience in real time, and The Unpanel, the closing round in which each guest presents one idea on which they have changed their perspective and one they continue to stand by.

Moderator

Tudor Curtifan is one of Romania's most authoritative analysts in security and strategic communication. He brings to the panel the ability to sustain several dimensions of the debate simultaneously, including geopolitics, domestic politics and transatlantic relations, without losing sight of the central issue: what Romania must decide and within what time frame. His moderation provides the setting for a necessary conversation in which diplomatic positions are tested against strategic reality and difficult questions have a place.

Common questions

- From the perspective of the institution or company you represent, what has changed over the past six months in the assessment of military risk in the Black Sea region?
- In the event of a ceasefire agreement in Ukraine, what should be accelerated and what could be reassessed in the current security agenda?
- Where do delays most frequently occur between the allocation of funding and the delivery of capability: in decision-making, procurement procedures, production or maintenance?
- What would strengthen Romania's position as a security provider in the region over the next twelve months?

Individual questions

- **H.E. Nicolas Warnery:** To what extent can the European defense pillar assume deterrence responsibilities within the time frame relevant to the eastern flank, and what capabilities can France make available in this framework?
- **H.E. Özgür Kıvanç Altan:** Trilateral cooperation in the Black Sea has delivered concrete results in protecting undersea infrastructure. What avenues for expansion are realistic in the coming period, and what conditions would be required to include other partners?
- **H.E. Hur Seung-chul:** Hanwha Aerospace is building its first European factory in Petrești. What factors drove this investment decision, and what would further facilitate the Korean industrial presence in Romania?
- **Prof. Vlad Nistor, PhD:** When the Western security agenda simultaneously encompasses two active theaters, which resources on the eastern flank are affected first, and how can this effect be offset?
- **Representative of the Ministry of National Defense:** What share of the SAFE contracts signed to date is accounted for by domestic industry, and what criteria determine whether a product is included in the procurement plan?
- **Sedef Vehbi:** Following the delivery of the first Cobra II vehicles manufactured entirely in Romania, what does the local supplier chain look like, and how are maintenance and intellectual property rights structured?
- **Representative of Lockheed Martin Romania:** The memoranda signed with Aerostar and MarcTel provide for industrial cooperation on complex capabilities. What share of the added value is generated in Romania, and how can this share grow?

Proposed speakers

Speaker	Role	Theme
H.E. Darryl Nirenberg	Ambassador of the United States of America (opening keynote)	Deterrence amid the resizing of the US military presence
H.E. Nicolas Warnery	Ambassador of the French Republic	The European defense pillar: from strategic autonomy to available capabilities
H.E. Özgür Kıvanç Altan	Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye	Black Sea security and the protection of critical undersea infrastructure
H.E. Hur Seung-chul	Ambassador of the Republic of Korea	Industrial investment and technology transfer: Romania as a European production platform
Prof. Vlad Nistor, PhD	Director General, Romanian Diplomatic Institute	Effects on the eastern flank of a security agenda involving two active theaters
Representative of the Ministry of National Defense at State Secretary level	Department for Defense Policy, Planning and International Relations	Implementation of the SAFE program and the 2027-2036 procurement plan
Sedef Vehbi	Head of Military Cluster, Otokar	Local production of armored vehicles: supplier chain, maintenance and technology transfer
Representative of Lockheed Martin Romania	Industrial cooperation on US defense capabilities	Deterrence capabilities developed jointly with Romanian industry

Panel 2 | The Future of Defense Technology

Context

At the first edition, the discussion of defense technologies remained largely at the level of intentions: production capacity was announced rather than demonstrated, and counter-drone defense was treated as an issue for the future. In the six months that followed, both topics were put to a practical test.

Since the beginning of the war, the Ministry of National Defense has reported 33 incursions by Russian drones into national airspace, and in recent months these have been neutralized on several occasions, including near the Danube Delta. Of the five shootdowns carried out so far by the air forces of European Union and NATO member states, four were performed by Romanian pilots. At the European level, the Commission published its action plan on drone and counter-drone security in February, while the Eastern Flank Watch program became the funding framework for surveillance and protection of the eastern flank.

At the same time, domestic production has become operational. The Orbotix factory in Ghimbav was inaugurated in May, with an announced capacity of up to 800 drones per month, while the partnership with Romaero envisages capacity of up to 1,500 units per month. Through the SAFE program, Romania has contracted 34 drone systems, alongside counter-drone systems included in the package of contracts signed in May, while Oves Enterprise has tested the first version of the Sahara cruise missile. In the armored vehicle segment, Otokar acquired Automecanica Mediaș and delivered the first Cobra II vehicles manufactured entirely in Romania in July, the most advanced example of an international production line being transferred to a local industrial platform.

The operating environment has changed over the same period. The Euro-Atlantic Resilience Centre documented a sustained electronic jamming campaign on Romanian territory, affecting civilian and military navigation. The regulatory framework has also advanced: amendments to the European Artificial Intelligence Regulation entered into force in July, while DNSC Order No. 1/2026 established national NIS2 compliance requirements for essential operators, including those in the defense industry. At the same time, the share of imports in the armed forces' equipment has brought a less visible issue back into public debate: access to source code and national control over the command-and-control systems on which the operation of other capabilities depends.

Proposed themes for the second edition

1. Counter-drone defense under real operating conditions

Repeated incursions have turned airspace protection from a planning topic into an implementation issue. This theme proposes a discussion of the full chain: detection, decision, interception and cost per interception, as well as the link least discussed publicly: the command-and-control system that connects sensors to combat assets and determines response time.

2. From prototype to series production

Announced manufacturing capacity is tested through deliveries, product qualification and continuity of the supplier chain. This theme brings private manufacturers, state-owned industry and international partners that have already transferred production to Romania into the same discussion: what prevents the transition from a validated prototype to a series-production contract, how orders should be calibrated to support investment in capacity, and which components remain dependent on imports.

3. Jamming, spoofing and navigation in a contested electromagnetic spectrum

Resilience to electronic warfare has become a performance criterion rather than an optional feature. This theme examines the available solutions, including inertial navigation, optical guidance, onboard autonomy and resilient communications, and how resistance to jamming is tested and certified before contracts are awarded.

4. Autonomy, artificial intelligence and control over critical software

Highly autonomous systems are entering the market at the same time as the European regulatory framework becomes applicable and cybersecurity compliance requirements extend to defense suppliers. This theme proposes a practical discussion of what can be certified today, how responsibility is established in operation, and who owns the rights to the software and source code of the systems on which the functioning of acquired capabilities depends.

Panel format

Opening keynote

Peter Burns, Executive Director of the Irregular Warfare Initiative: a 10-12-minute address before the panel takes the stage. The keynote places the technology discussion in the broader context of the changing nature of conflict: low-cost systems that produce strategic effects, and the consequences of this asymmetry for defense planning on the eastern flank.

Panel

- General (Ret.) Daniel Petrescu, former Chief of the Defense Staff
- Bogdan Ochiană, Co-founder, Orbotix
- Răzvan Pîrcălăbescu, Director General, Romarm
- Mihai Filip, Founder and CEO, Oves Enterprise
- Marian Ivănescu, General Manager, Interactive Software (ISW)
- Representative of a Ukrainian manufacturer of unmanned systems
- Representative of SIG Sauer
- Dan Cîmpean, Director, National Cyber Security Directorate

Moderators

Andreea Soare is an international security analyst at Monitorul Apărării și Securității, regularly conducting interviews and producing analysis on European defense, industry and cybersecurity. Adrian Popa is a journalist with the ArcMedia group and produces the Frontier Defense podcast, hosted by G4Media, with twenty years of experience in technology and the defense industry. Together, they cover the panel's two dimensions: the strategic and regulatory framework, and the technical and industrial realities of production.

Common questions

- In your field, what is the difference between announced capacity and capacity that is actually available today?
- What condition would need to be met over the next twelve months for defense technology production in Romania to reach a higher scale?
- Where do the longest delays occur: in product qualification, procurement procedures, the supplier chain or compliance?
- Which element of operational experience in Ukraine is least transferable to the procurement practices of NATO states?

Individual questions

- **General (Ret.) Daniel Petrescu:** Four of the five shootdowns carried out by allied air forces were performed by Romanian pilots. What has worked in the current response procedure, and what would most reduce the time between detection and decision?
- **Bogdan Ochiană:** With an announced capacity of up to 800 drones per month in Ghimbav and a target of 1,500 together with Romaero, what level of predictable orders is needed to sustain this capacity, and which components remain dependent on external suppliers?
- **Răzvan Pîrcălăbescu:** You have publicly argued that the current operating model limits the development of national industry. What change would have the greatest immediate effect, and how is Romarm positioned in relation to the private manufacturers that have recently entered the market?
- **Mihai Filip:** Sahara and Nemesis are being developed around AI-enabled autonomy. What part of this technology can be certified under the current European framework, and what is needed to secure a series-production contract?
- **Marian Ivănescu:** More than 50 Romanian Armed Forces commands use command-and-control platforms developed in Romania. What is lost in operational terms when the state does not own the rights to the source code of an acquired system, and how should this requirement be formulated in procurement specifications?
- **Representative of the Ukrainian manufacturer:** Ukrainian production has expanded into several European states. What conditions make such cooperation effective, and what would be relevant to a potential industrial presence in Romania?
- **Representative of SIG Sauer:** Under what conditions does licensed production or assembly in Europe become viable beyond the supply of equipment, and what does ensuring maintenance throughout the system's life cycle involve?
- **Dan Cîmpean:** DNSC Order No. 1/2026 establishes NIS2 requirements for essential operators. How do these apply to defense industry manufacturers, and how can they be met without delaying deliveries?

Proposed speakers

Speaker	Role	Theme
Peter Burns	Executive Director, Irregular Warfare Initiative (opening keynote)	The changing nature of conflict: low-cost systems, strategic effects
General (Ret.) Daniel Petrescu	Former Chief of the Defense Staff (2019-2023)	Counter-drone defense of national airspace: decision-making chain, equipment and response time
Bogdan Ochiană	Co-founder, Orbotix	From prototype to series production: national drone manufacturing capacity
Răzvan Pîrcălăbescu	Director General, Romarm	The role of state-owned industry in series production and the supplier chain
Mihai Filip	Founder and CEO, Oves Enterprise	Autonomy and artificial intelligence in precision-strike systems
Marian Ivănescu	General Manager, Interactive Software (ISW)	Command and control, and national control over critical defense software
Representative of a Ukrainian manufacturer of unmanned systems	To be determined	Lessons from operational use and industrial cooperation with Romania
Representative of SIG Sauer	Industrial partner, infantry weapons and systems integration	Standardization, maintenance and licensed production in Europe
Dan Cîmpean	Director, National Cyber Security Directorate	Compliance, cybersecurity and the responsible use of autonomy

Panel 3 | The Economics of Defense

Context

At the first edition, the panel started from a simple premise: moving from 2% to 5% of GDP cannot be achieved through budget reallocation, but through the development of an industry that generates revenue. The discussion highlighted two concrete problems. First, the absence of a long-term procurement plan from which industry could infer what would be needed and when. Second, the difficulty a private company faces in obtaining development financing when a bank requires an already signed contract as a precondition.

In the six months that followed, the first problem received an institutional response. The SAFE loan agreement between Romania and the European Commission, worth EUR 16.7 billion, was signed in May, the first tranche was disbursed in August, and in September the Supreme Council of National Defense approved the procurement plan for 2027-2036, with a commitment to increase the budget allocation to 5% of GDP by 2035. For the first time, industry has a formalized planning horizon.

The second problem has remained unresolved, although the framework has changed considerably. Romania is becoming a founding member of the Defense, Security and Resilience Bank, an international financial institution dedicated to financing defense and critical infrastructure projects. The European Investment Bank has expanded its eligibility criteria and quadrupled financing for the sector to EUR 4.8 billion. The Government has approved the establishment of a Fund of Funds for strategic sectors, while the Association of Fund Managers has proposed amending legislation to allow pension funds to invest in defense companies listed on the Bucharest Stock Exchange.

It remains to be seen how much of this financing framework reaches the tier-two or tier-three supplier: the company with a few dozen employees that needs working capital, guarantees and predictable orders to enter a production chain. This is the gap the panel is tasked with measuring.

Proposed themes for the second edition

1. The loan must be repaid. What remains afterward

SAFE is a loan, not a grant. The EUR 16.7 billion becomes part of public debt and will be repaid from the budgets of the coming years. The difference between a well-used loan and a poorly used one lies in what remains in the economy once repayments begin: production capacity and jobs, or merely imported equipment. This theme adds a market issue: all European states are buying the same categories of equipment at the same time, pushing up prices and lengthening delivery times. How much is realistically lost in this competition, and who is accountable for the outcome?

2. Local integration: how it is calculated and who verifies it

The figure of 80-90% of contract value that would remain in Romania has been stated publicly, including at the forum's first edition, but the calculation method has never been presented. This theme calls for a breakdown: what is included in the percentage, such as labor, components, licenses, software and maintenance, and what share consists of local assembly of imported subassemblies. It also covers the mechanism by which the state secures these commitments: for every procurement exceeding the EUR 10 million threshold, industrial cooperation requirements are set by the Romanian state. It remains to be established what happens to the Romanian company after the foreign supplier's obligation ends, who monitors implementation when contracts are classified, and whether the engineers and authorized personnel needed to sustain the promised percentage are available.

3. Financing the supplier: credit, guarantees and new institutions

The ESG-related restrictions that kept European banks away from the defense sector have eased, while dedicated financial institutions are multiplying. This theme examines actual lending conditions: what guarantees are required from a company without a signed contract, how risk is assessed in a sector with long cycles, and what role public guarantee instruments and new defense banks can play.

4. Private capital for small and medium-sized companies

Investment funds with a defense technology mandate, pension funds and capital markets are becoming potential sources of financing for companies that lack access to major programs. This theme examines the conditions under which this capital actually comes in: governance and transparency requirements, sector-specific authorization restrictions, and the difference in treatment between dual-use companies and strictly military businesses.

Panel format

Opening keynote

The Presidential Adviser for Defense and National Security: a 10-12-minute address before the panel takes the stage. The keynote places the economic discussion within the framework of Romania's commitment to increase the budget allocation to 5% of GDP, and within the logic of the procurement plan approved by the Supreme Council of National Defense.

Panel

- Minister of National Defense
- Minister of Economy
- Representative of ARCTIS
- Representative of the banking sector (BCR or Citi)
- Representative of an investment fund with a defense technology mandate (Expeditions Fund II, Keen Venture Partners or Nucleo Ventures)
- Representative of a private supplier company in the defense industry
- Representative of the Defense Industry Employers' Organization

Moderator

Moise Guran is one of Romania's best-known journalists and economic analysts. He does not come with prepared answers, but with the questions that make answers impossible to avoid. In a debate where figures can be used as arguments and ambitions can replace plans, his moderation provides the setting for a necessary conversation in which data are tested against reality and institutional positions are checked against the evidence.

Common questions

- What has actually changed for your institution or company following the signing of the SAFE agreement and the approval of the procurement plan?
- The EUR 16.7 billion must be repaid. What needs to exist in the Romanian economy when repayments begin for the loan to have been worthwhile?
- How is the percentage of money that remains in Romania calculated, and who verifies it independently?
- What is currently the main obstacle to financing a Romanian company in the defense industry?
- What decision taken over the next twelve months would have the greatest effect on national industrial capacity?

Individual questions

- **Minister of National Defense:** The procurement plan covers a decade, and the financing must be repaid. What part of the plan can be communicated to industry as a predictable order horizon without compromising classification requirements?
- **Minister of Economy:** What instruments does the ministry have to support a Romanian supplier in the period between product qualification and its first series-production contract, when risk is most difficult to finance?
- **Representative of ARCTIS:** When it is announced that 80-90% of a contract's value remains in Romania, what exactly does this percentage include, and what documents support its verification?
- **Representative of the banking sector:** What conditions must a defense industry company meet today to obtain financing, and what change in risk assessment would open access for small and medium-sized companies?
- **Representative of the investment fund:** What characteristics make a Romanian company in this sector investable, and what factors disqualify an application before the financial analysis?
- **Representative of the private supplier company:** From the position of a supplier in a major program, what has been most difficult to obtain: technical qualification, financing, authorization or access to information on future requirements?
- **Representative of OPIA:** After all the changes over the past year, which request from private industry remains the least addressed?

Proposed speakers

Speaker	Role	Theme
Presidential Adviser for Defense and National Security	Presidential Administration (opening keynote)	The commitment to 5% of GDP and financing the procurement plan
Minister of National Defense	Ministry of National Defense	Implementation of the SAFE program and predictability of orders to industry
Minister of Economy	Ministry of Economy	Defense industrial policy: from import contracts to production capacity
Representative of ARCTIS	Romanian Agency for Technological and Industrial Cooperation for Security and Defense	How local integration is calculated and verified
Representative of the banking sector	BCR or Citi	Banks' appetite for financing the defense industry and the conditions they impose
Representative of an investment fund with a defense technology mandate	Expeditions Fund II, Keen Venture Partners or Nucleo Ventures	Growth capital for small and medium-sized defense companies
Representative of a private supplier company in the defense industry	Tier-two or tier-three supplier in a major program	What access to a series-production contract means in practice
Representative of the Defense Industry Employers' Organization	OPIA	What private industry is asking for: predictability, guarantees and access to financing