

## CHOOSING THE PROFESSION OF OFFICER – BETWEEN ASPIRATION AND HIGH RESPONSIBILITY

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*Abstract: In giving the definition and the basic objectives of any society, especially in the first decades of the 21st century, the field of national and international security and defense occupies a distinct place. The growing complexity of the performance standards necessary to successfully fulfill the tasks incumbent to organizations active in the field of security and defense ranks the military profession on a well defined and very important place. In carrying out the inherent missions, the military institution needs professional soldiers, among whom the officers constitute its most valuable body. Consequently, each and every officer must prove that they understand very well the requirements of this noble status. In this respect, our study, with a representative sample of students from the three years of study at the "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, aims to identify significant landmarks of the students' options for the profession of officer, knowing that the time preceding the start of their officer career becomes the solid foundation on which the personality of the future officers of the Romanian Land Forces will be built and perfected on. The conducted investigation shows a plethora of reasons behind opting for an officer career, including professional, moral, material and spiritual values. Given this diversity of options for the officer career, the research reveals that military students have customized those personality traits that can ensure the fulfillment of the requirements circumscribed to the personality of the modern officer in a highly professionalized army.*

*Key-words: profession, higher education, officer, personality, military career*

### 1. Introduction

Romania's new status as NATO and EU member country triggered and generated ongoing significant new requirements for the professionalization of the Romanian Army and, first of all, of its most important body, that the officers. This statute whose complexity and quality significantly increase by comparison to the current and future characteristics of the combat space specific to the first decades of the 21st century and the role that the military has for defending the national interests and the security, democracy and peace in the whole world permanent bring about new conditions for the level and structure of the skills needed to configure the personality of the officer in general, and of the Land Forces officer, in particular. In this respect, the identification and accurate knowledge of personality traits among which particularly important are the attitudes of the

future officers can ensure their training at the standards specific to the modern officer member of the most efficient national and international structures. For this objective, good knowledge of the plethora of reasons and factors underlying the choice of the officer career contributes to the substantiation, development and process of higher military education, in a different way, and centered on the military student. The experience accumulated in the military field and the research specific to military science convincingly appreciate that choosing the officer profession has been the solid foundation on which the entire military career will be built on and developed.

## **2. Some Concerns about the Profession of Officer**

Choosing the military career, in general, and the officer profession, in particular, has constituted the main direction of research that has been increasingly present in the concerns of the theoreticians and practitioners in the military domain. The growing interest in this line of investigation has increasingly developed, being determined by the presence and action of certain significant factors that shape the personality and work of the officer, the most important military factor in the composition of the military structures. Starting right from the skills that configure the personality of the contemporary officer in the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the leadership of the armies drafted legislation [1] to create the appropriate legal framework for the recruitment policies of the future officers. They were also equally concerned with knowing the options of the youngsters for the profession of officer and how to make promotion convincing.

In turn, theoreticians and analysts of the officer profession, in their few theoretical constructions, have focused their efforts on tackling different key issues, significant for the three main steps on the road map of the young people towards the officer career, namely: recruitment and selection of young people for higher military education, training and improvement of the profession of officer and the way in which the development of the officers in the military career evolves. These fundamental directions of analysis also differentiate and develop multidimensional aspects specific to each of them. There are authors who analyze the determinants of the profession of officer [2], the cadets' training motivation [3] or comprehensive aspects of the training process of the modern officer [4].

It is known that “essential to the success of the educational and instructional process in the Land Forces Academy is that the military students become aware of what the professional identity of the officer is and, implicitly, of the unique characteristics of the military profession. Starting from this, each military student will develop a personal concept in relation to the profession he or she wishes to devote himself/herself to” [5], and whose opinions are formed before entering the academy.

Therefore, our study, among the few present in the military literature in Romania, is trying to respond to some issues insufficiently explored so far, but of paramount importance and relevance for the creation of a powerful military academic environment that can be achieved by enhancing the personality traits of the military students, including attitudes and individual motivation for the officer profession, which are not only triggers for the opinions of young people starting an officer career, but are also consistent and constituent fundamentals of the quality of their becoming officers and for their completion during the officer career.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The formulation of the theme of our research required the appropriate development of goals, objectives, methods and a proper selection of the sample of students from the “Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy in Sibiu, so that the results be accurate, meaningful and realistic.

#### **3.1. Purpose and Objectives**

The *purpose* of the investigation was to know the reasons and factors that influenced the choice of the students for the profession of officer and for training in this institution.

*Objectives:* the analysis of personal reasons that underpinned the option for the profession of officer; to identify the external factors of the personality of the students, which influenced their choice of the officer profession; to know the reasons that led them to choose the Land Forces Academy.

#### **3.2. Formulated Hypotheses**

The diversity of the college and high school educational environment causes a variety of reasons that influence the choice of the officer career. The stronger the youngsters’ interpersonal relationships with key educational factors, the greater their option for the profession of officer is. Among the several factors that can influence the choice of the Land Forces Academy, intrinsic factors rank highest.

#### **3.3. Method**

The method and research tools used – the social survey and the questionnaire – were considered necessary and sufficient real opportunities to objectively identify the opinions of the military students.

#### **3.4. Participants**

The research was conducted on a representative sample consisting of 30 % of the students of each academic year.

#### **3.5. Results and Discussions**

We believe that, based on the constructed items, the questionnaire succeeded in identifying relevant opinions of students that can be used to analyze, in an objective and realistic manner, all the opinions that can configure the general picture of the incentives that trigger and sustain the desire to follow a military career, as a future officer in the Romanian Land Forces.

We consider that both the data collected and the manner adopted in order to make a quantitative analysis supported by a qualitative one by calculating, recording and interpreting the global score values and other scores specific to the variables constructed and the categories of respondents that were investigated, may become relevant and valid responses regarding the option of the current students for the future profession of officer, and, respectively, for the military cadet status in the “Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy in Sibiu.

For this, item no. 3 in the questionnaire, based on the variables presented in table no. 1 aimed at identifying the reasons that influenced the choice for the profession of officer. The item has the following content: *On a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important), please specify*

the following reasons that you took into account in choosing the profession of officer, by entering an X next to your response.

Table no. 1. Variables of questionnaire item no. 3

The Variable	
a. skills for this domain	h. the need to have a workplace
b. the nobility of the profession	i. the pride to be an officer
c. the stability of the job	j. the desire to serve national interests
d. salary/payment	k. the possibility to participate in international missions
e. the desire to work with people	l. the sense of duty to other people
f. the respect that society has for officers	Others. Which ones? m. ...
g. the feeling of professional achievement	n. ...

From the analysis of table no. 1 and figure no. 1 results that the highest calculated overall score is 3.98 for the military students in the second year and very close for the cadets in the third and first year, with a value of 3.93, 3.92 respectively.

If first year students had as main reasons in choosing the profession of officer the *stability of the job* and those in the second year *the stability of the job* and *the pride in being an officer*, variables which had the same value, the third year students ranged *salary* as the most important reason. If students in the first and second year stated that the *stability of the job*, the *salary* and *feeling of professional achievement* are the top three reasons, the second year cadets chose as reasons *the stability of the job*, *the pride of being an officer* and *the desire to serve the national interests*. All students identified a realistic reason, related to the fact that Romania has not yet overcome the crisis situation, i.e. the reason of the stability of the job. If students in the first and third year still remain in the area of extrinsic motivation in choosing the second reason, and are driven by intrinsic motivations regarding the third one, second year cadets bring to the attention a rich load of national and military responsibility.

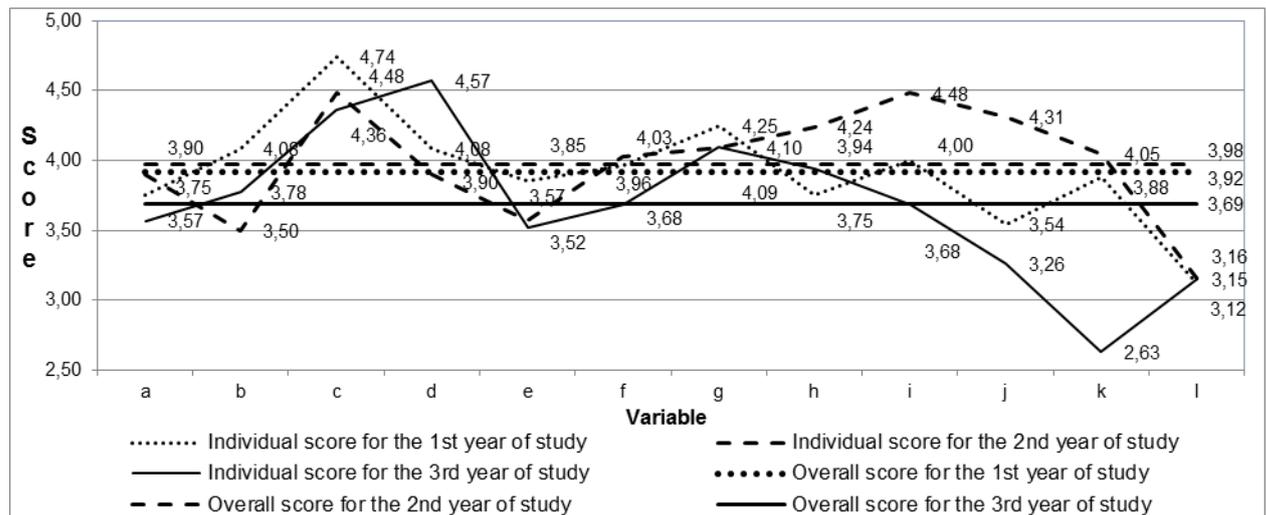


Figure no. 1. Correlation between the overall and individual scores according to years of study

At the opposite end of the lowest scores, the first year students mention *the sense of duty towards other people, the desire to serve national interests and the need to have a workplace*, second year cadets identified *the sense of duty towards other people, the nobility of the profession and the respect the society has for the officer*, while third year students nominate *the opportunity to participate in international missions, the sense of duty towards the others and the desire to serve national interests*.

In a decreasing sequence according to their frequency in the opinion of the students in three years of academy, some of the other reasons are *the sense of duty towards other people* (three times), *the desire to serve national interests* (twice), while the other four, which appear only once, demonstrate the distancing of the cadets from certain moral values, but also a realistic vision of what the profession of officer can offer, and its status in the Romanian society. While still at the beginning of their career and life as officers, with its whole arsenal of obligations and circumstances, the cadets are still in the process of finalizing the knowledge and personality traits that configure skills, qualities and moral, professional and spiritual features of the modern officer.

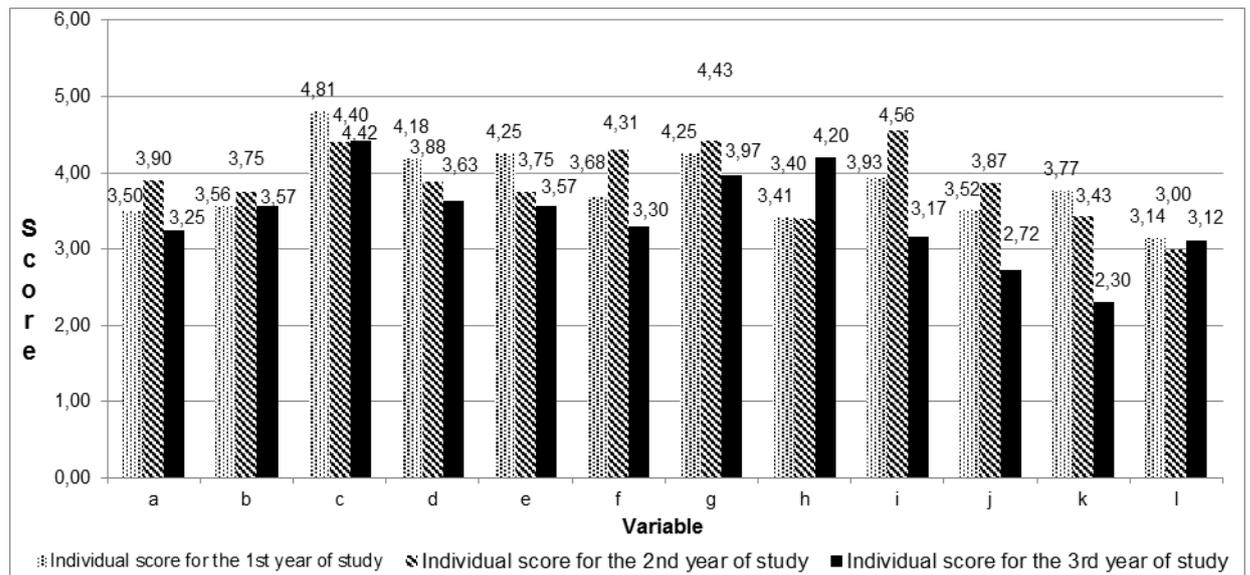


Figure no. 2. Correlation between individual scores according to years of study in the military colleges

Another group of students' responses to the same item was performed in regard to the colleges graduated before the admission to the academy, namely civil or military colleges and high schools. As shown in Figure 2, the highest overall score for the students coming from military colleges was obtained by students in the second year, with a value of 3.89, and the lowest by the third year students, whose value is 3.43. First year students stated that the most important reasons, *the stability of the service, the desire to work with people and the feeling of professional accomplishment*, while second year students mentioned *the pride of being an officer, the feeling of professional achievement and the respect the society shows for the officer*; third year students opted for *the stability of the job, the need to have a workplace and the feeling of professional achievement*.

We can appreciate that the military students who attended military colleges have formed and reinforced one of the most important values of the officer profession, that of *the feeling of professional achievement*, followed by *the stability of the job*. The other reasons can be grouped into intrinsic reasons for choosing the officer career, *the pride of being an officer, the desire to work with people* or another option that signifies a social value, namely *the respect enjoyed by the officer in the society*. These choices of military college graduates already express the existence of personality traits that are circumscribed to the requirements specific to the physiognomy of the modern officer and, consequently, of the profession of officer.

On the other hand, the reasons that are at the opposite end, the scores with the lowest values focus on *the sense of duty towards other people, the opportunity to participate in international missions*, reasons that are common to the three years of study, more specifically, *the sense of duty towards other people*, common to the second and third years of study or specific to each year of study, for example, *the possibility to participate in international missions* specific to the first year students. As specific reasons for the freshmen are *the skills for this domain*, the second year mentions *the need to have a workplace*, and the third year *the respect that society has for the officer*. The highest overall score was obtained by the second year cadets, followed by students in

the first year and the third year respectively. If the first year students designated *the stability of the job* as the main reason for choosing the profession of officer, the same as the students in the third year, the second year cadets have specified *the pride of being an officer*. The lowest values of the reasons in choosing the profession of officer for the first and second year was *the sense of duty towards other people*, from the third year cadets *the opportunity to participate in international missions*. The presence of the reasons listed by the students who have previously opted for a military career proved a visible shift in attitude towards peers in their own country or other countries, of the attitudes towards themselves or other people in the Romanian society towards the status of officer.

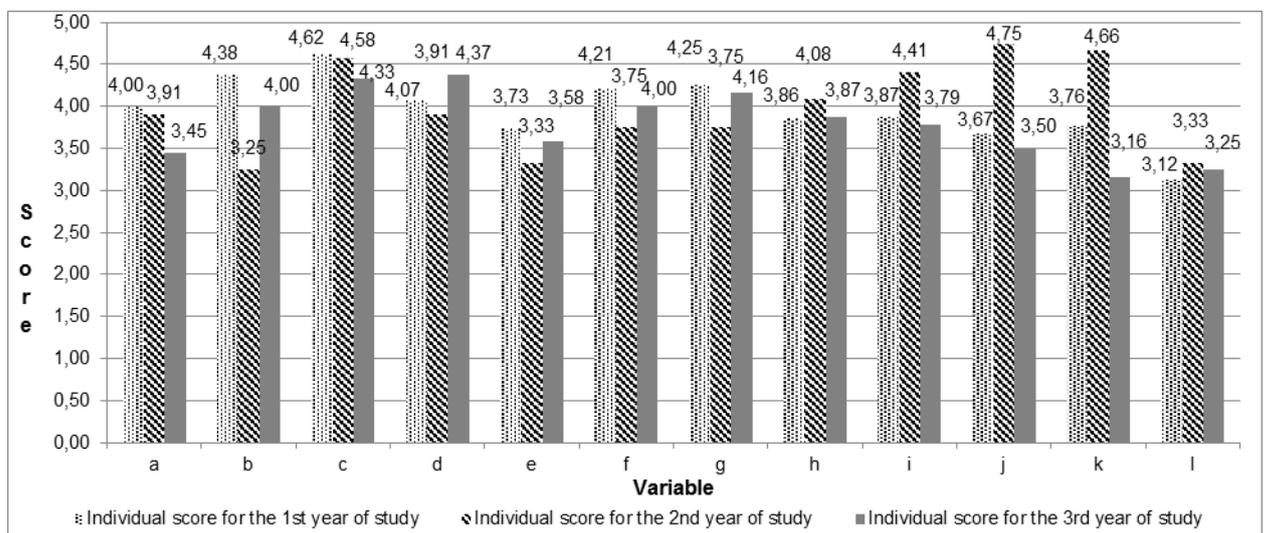


Figure no. 3. Correlation between individual scores according to years of study in the civilian high schools and colleges

The responses of the other students who have graduated from a civilian high school or college show some differences from their peers who have graduated from military colleges, as represented in Figure no. 3. First and third year students identified as top three reasons *the stability of the job* and *the sense of professional accomplishment*, second year students have chosen *the desire to serve national interests* and *the possibility to participate in international missions*. Maintenance reasons with appreciated intrinsic value, second year cadets stand out clearly from the others in the first and third years, where the determinant reason is extrinsic, that of *the stability of the job*, but with a rich existential feature characteristic to today's younger generations. The lowest value of the individual scores was received by *the sense of duty towards other people*, which, correlated with the same position, marked by the students who graduated from military colleges, becomes the most rejected reason by the students in the academy. This severe diagnosis given by the students is to be considered an objective response that has its cognitive and affective, axiological and evaluative roots in the spirit of today's society, and especially of the Western culture, which place individualism at the center of the social values.

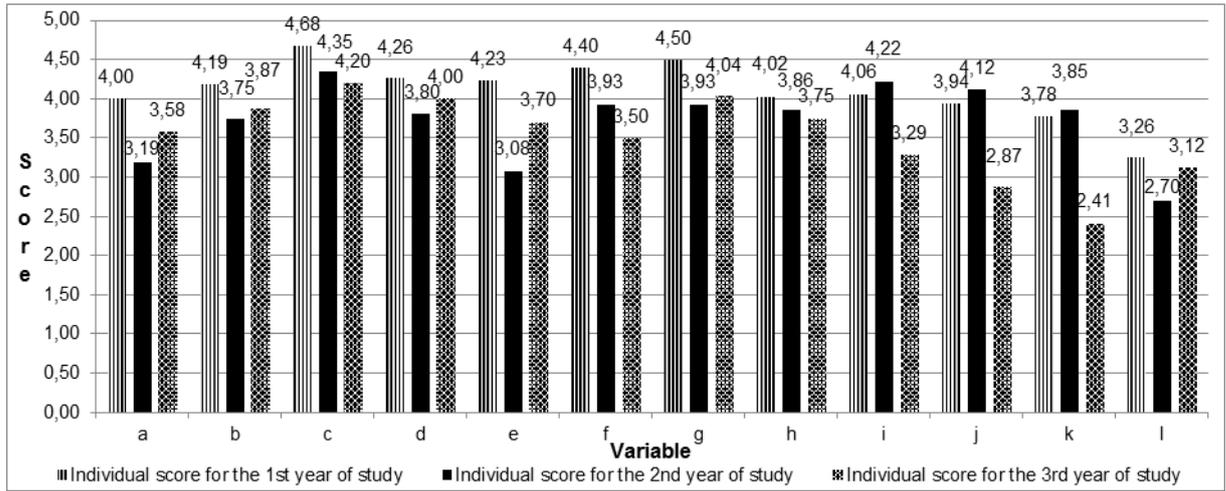


Figure no. 4. Correlation between individual scores of the male students, according to years of study

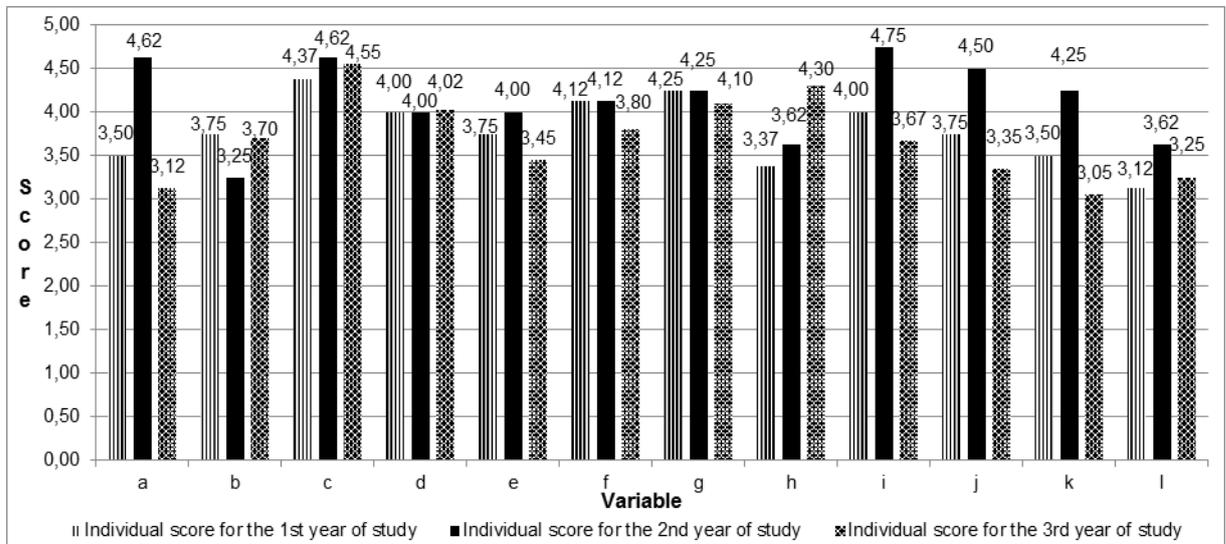


Figure no. 5. Correlation between individual scores of the female students, according to years of study

More homogeneous results are obtained when analyzing the views of male students and female students separately as shown in figures no. 4 and no. 5. *The feeling of professional achievement* and *the stability of the job*, which determined their option for the officer career, appear as common reasons among the female cadets. The same two reasons appear at the first and third year female students and only one common reason for the second year female cadets, namely *the stability of the job*. Male cadets in the first and third year present two common reasons, one of which identical with that of the second year students, regarding *the stability of the job*. Female students scored high on the following reasons: *the respect the society has for officers*, *the pride in being an officer* and *the need to have a workplace*. On the other hand, the highest scores for the male cadets are obtained by: *the salary* and *the feeling of professional achievement*. The presence of those reasons among all students, and the differences between them among female, male students or students from different years of study, highlight the existence of a common basic motivational

dimension and also of a different one, determined by the personality structure of each student or of each gender, male or female.

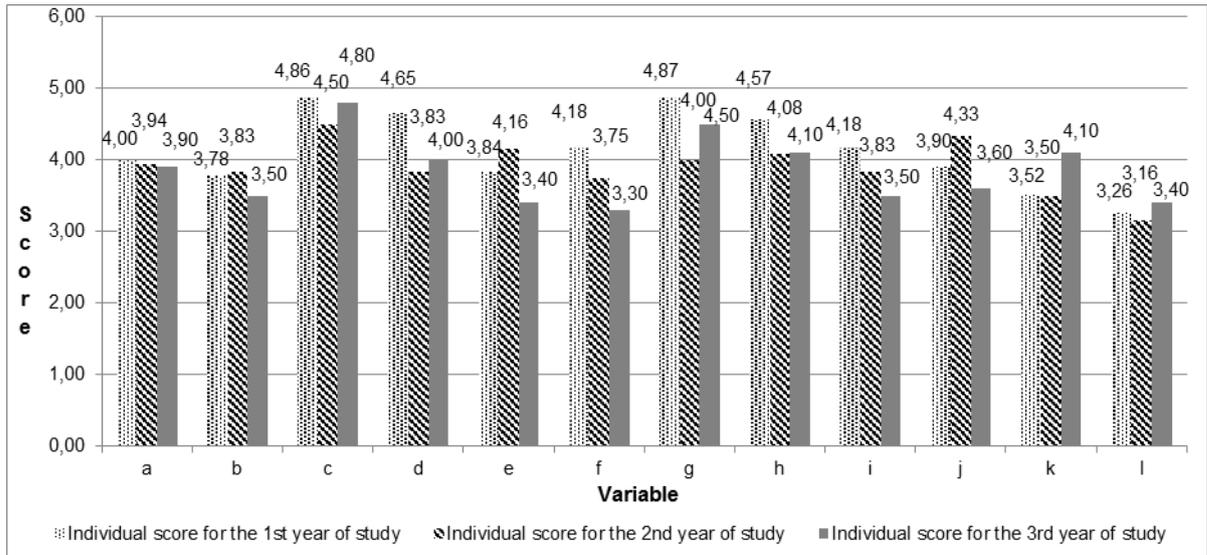


Figure no. 6. Correlation between individual scores in the urban environment, according to years of study

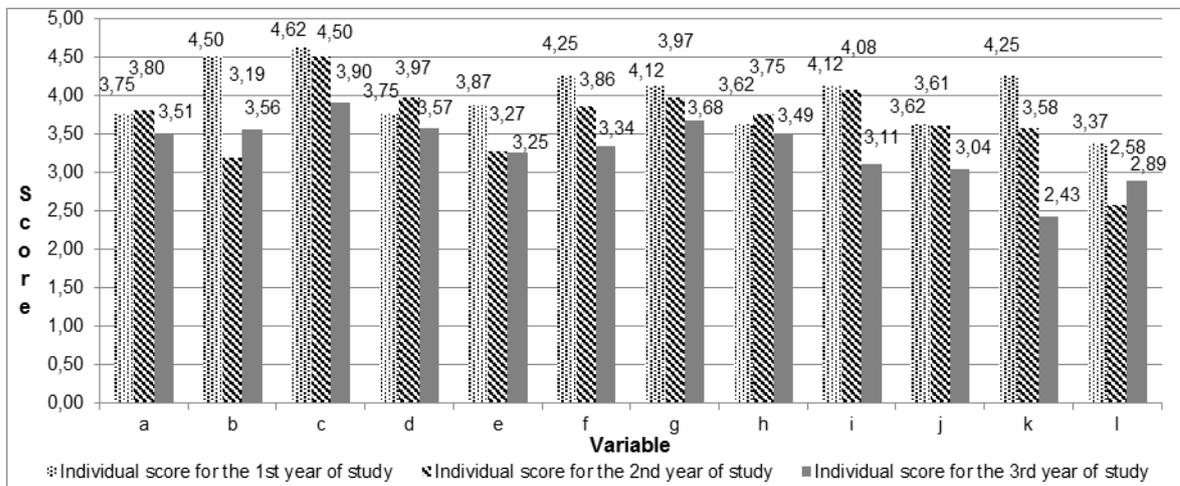


Figure no. 7. Correlation between individual scores, in the rural environment, according to years of study

Interesting aspects also result from the analysis and the opinions of the students grouped according to the area of residence, in figures no. 6 and no. 7. The overall score of 4.34 is the highest and was calculated for the first year students from rural areas and the lowest overall score is 3.3, the result of the third year students' opinions, also from rural areas. As a common ground for all students, regardless of the year of study or area of residence, is *the stability of the job*. Other common reasons are for two years of study, such as *the desire to work with people* for the first year and the second year students in rural areas, and *the feeling of professional achievement* for the students in the second and the third year from rural areas. As individual scores with the lowest

values, for the rural areas, are reasons such as *the opportunity to participate in international missions*, in the case of the third year cadets, *the feeling of duty towards other people* for the second year students, and *the nobility of the profession* for the freshmen. For the students coming from urban areas, the last reasons that have determined the choice of profession are *the respect that the society has for the officers*, in the case of the third year students, and *the sense of duty towards other people* as a common reason for students in the first and the second year of study.

Obtaining the highest and the lowest scores, as well as the choice of the same reasons by students in rural areas shows a stable polarization of their options, one of the explanations being a more pronounced mature development of their personality as compared to those in urban areas. The presence of the reasons listed above on the last place in the hierarchy established by the students coming from urban areas shows that the urban population shows a certain indifference and even rejection of the officer profession, while the rural population maintains the same respect and recognition of the importance of the profession of officer.

Of course, in choosing the profession of officer, and especially of the military career as an officer of the Land Forces, an important role was played by the various factors that influenced this option to a greater or lesser extent. To analyze the diversity and intensity of these factors, we specifically formulated item no. 4, stating: *On a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), what was the influence of the following factors in choosing the profession of officer?*

Table no. 2. Variables of questionnaire item no. 4

The Variable							
a.	b.	c.	d.	e.	the	Others.	Which
mass-media	parents	relatives	friends	teachers		ones?	
						f.	
						.....	
						g.	
						.....	
						h.	
						.....	

The analysis of figure no. 8 shows that the highest overall score was obtained by the first year students, followed by the second and the third year students who have obtained the same score, which demonstrates the same intensity of the influence of the analyzed variables. If *the parents* are the ones who influenced mostly the choice of all students, *media* had the smallest influence in the case of the first and the third year cadets, respectively *relatives* for the second year students.

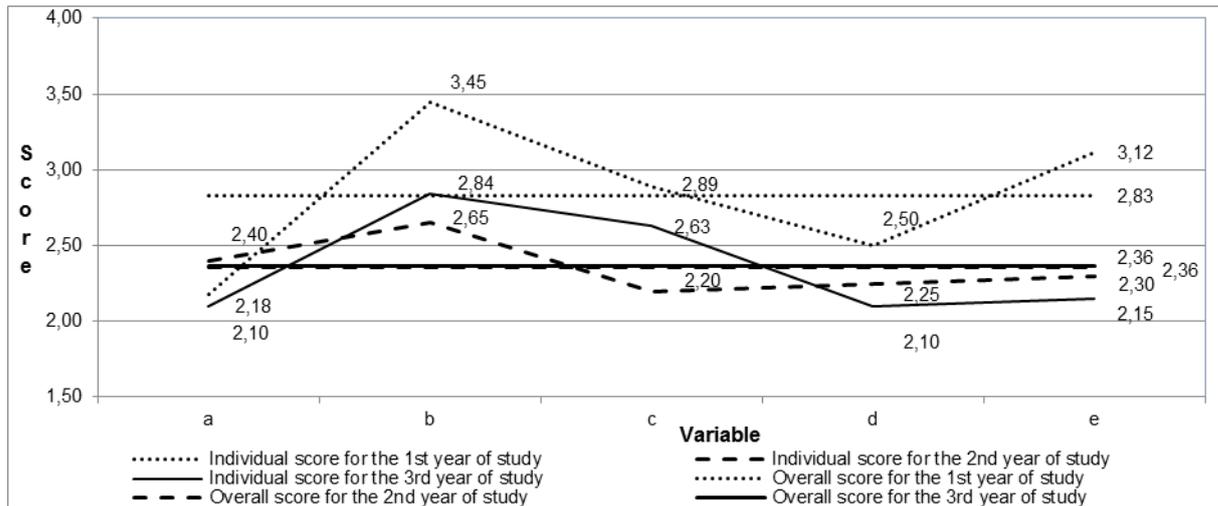


Figure no. 8. Correlation between the overall and individual scores according to years of study

The data presented in figures no. 9 and no. 10 reflect the views of the students according to the high schools and colleges they graduated from, and show that *parents* have the greatest influence among military college graduates for the second and third year students, while the first year cadets were influenced by *the teachers* they had. In the case of all students, *the media* appears to be the lowest impact factor. One conclusion is obvious: military college graduates are more influenced by the human factors with important social responsibilities for their life than the advertising factors.

Students coming from civilian high schools and colleges rank as first influencing factor *the parents* and, surprisingly, the second year students rank *the media*, but true, followed by *parents*. Conversely, the lowest scores were obtained by *teachers*, as the opinion of the second and the third year students, while the first year cadets opted for the *media*. This difference among this group of students is considered to be the consequence of a less close relationship with the teachers and a more present action of the media.

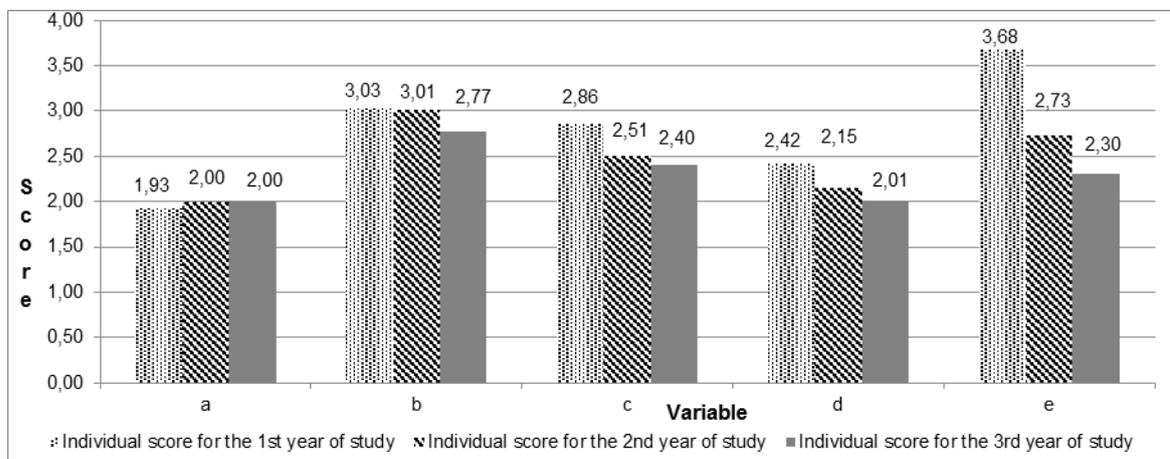


Figure no. 9. Correlation between individual scores according to years of study in the military colleges

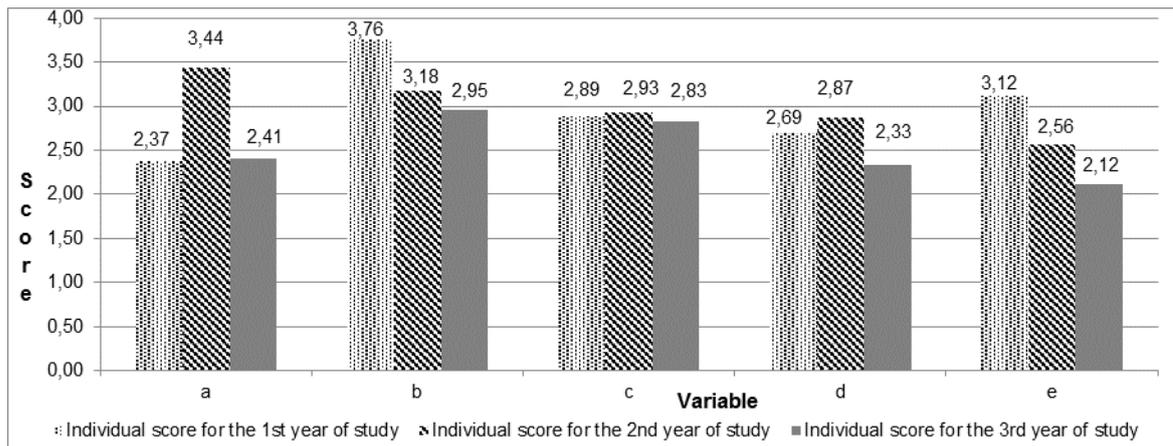


Figure no. 10. Correlation between individual scores according to years of study in the civilian high schools and colleges

Interesting are also the differences of opinion that gender-generated. The male cadets, figure no. 11, designate as the main factor influencing their choice of profession of officer, *the teachers* who had trained them, while the second year students mention the *media* and third year ones *the relatives*. The lowest scores were identified for the following factors: *media* for the first and the third year students, respectively *relatives* for the first and the second year students. We believe that the existence of common opinions, sometimes located on the opposite side, is given by a certain tendency for *the media* in the case of the first year students and the existence of certain dysfunctionalities in dealing with *the relatives* for the first and the second year students.

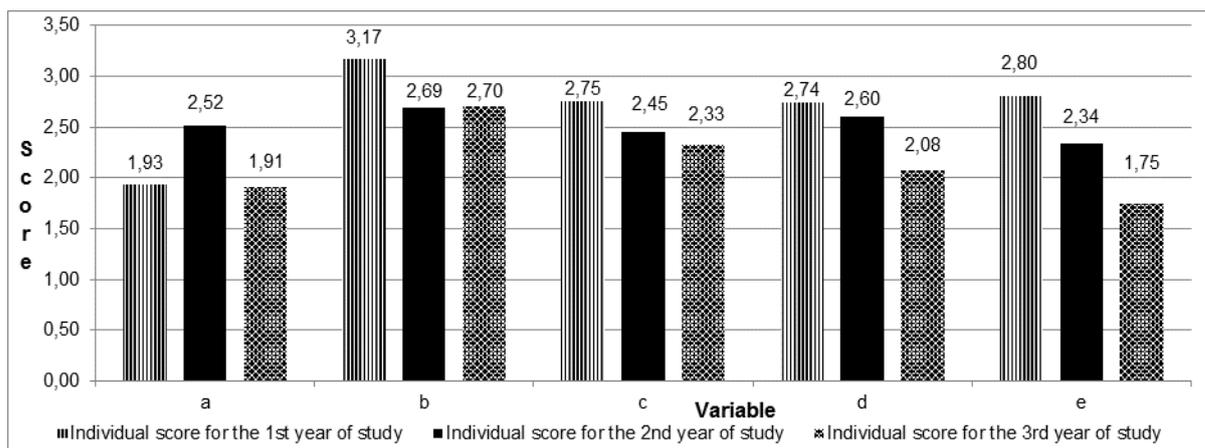


Figure no. 11. Correlation between individual scores of the male students, according to years of study

Female students have better views grouped on the three years of education, as shown in the figure below. They appreciate the decisive role of *the parents* and less the action of other human factors, namely *relatives* and *friends*.

One thing is certain: both female and male cadets value less the opinions of *friends*, either because they have a weak influence, or because they discuss few personal issues or simply because they may not have real friends.

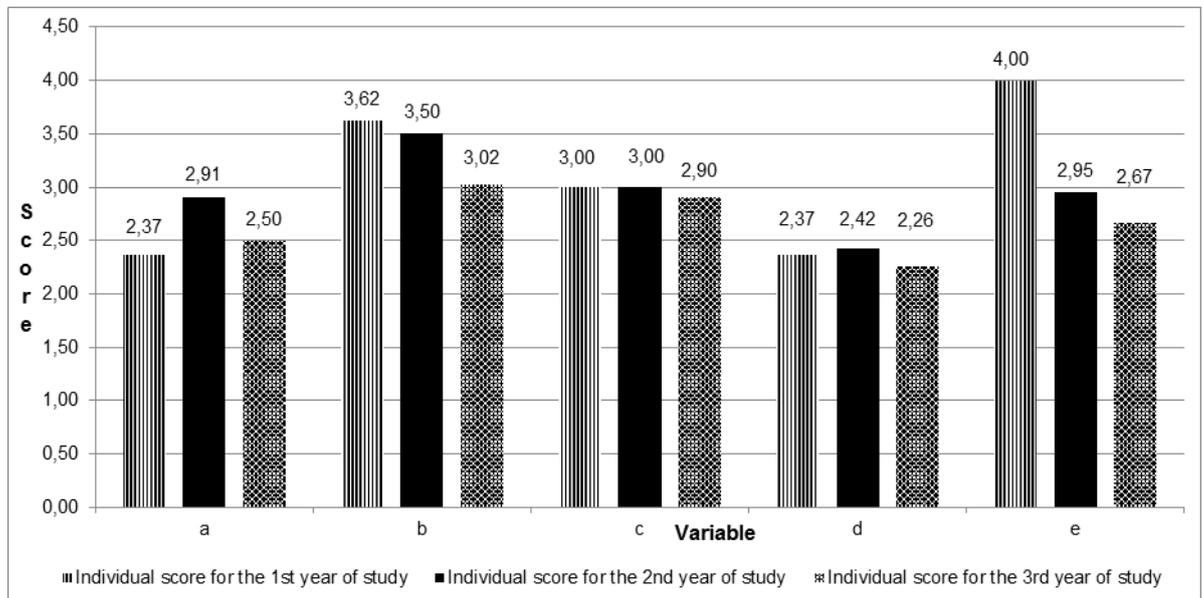


Figure no. 12. Correlation between individual scores of the female students, according to years of study

As shown in figures no. 13 and no. 14, the area of residence is very important, which, in relation to the variables presented in Table no. 2, shows that students who come from urban areas are more influenced, in the order of years of education, by *teachers*, *parents*, and *relatives*. For the students coming from rural environments, the greatest influence is that of *the parents* in all years of study. In contrast, for students coming from urban areas, *media* and *relatives* are most influential, while for students who come from rural areas the least present motivation is the influence of *the media* and *relatives*.

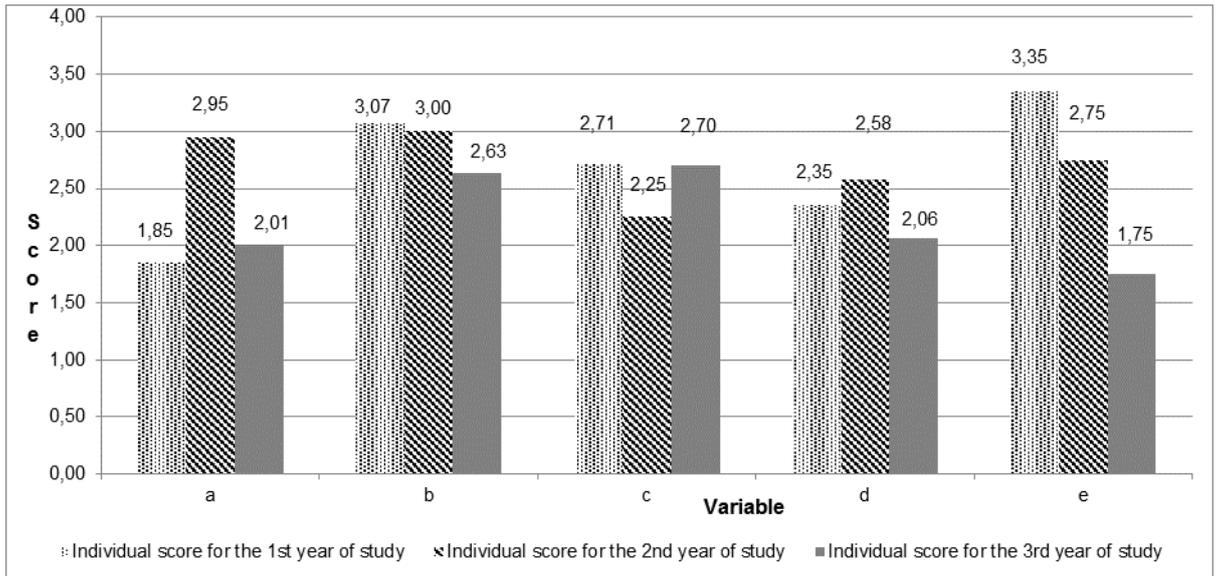


Figure no. 13. Correlation between individual scores in the urban environment, according to years of study

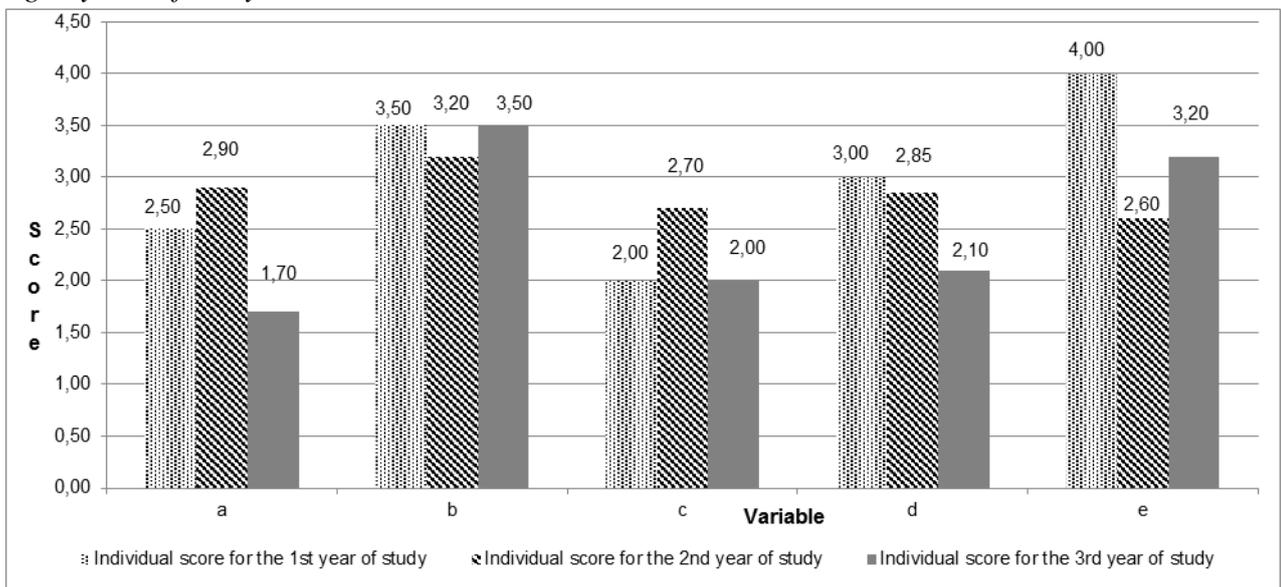


Figure no. 14. Correlation between individual scores, in the rural environment, according to years of study

Through its socio-educational features, the residential environment strengthens the connection between children and parents, relatives and teachers, maintaining a cognitive distance of all students from the media. The analysis of the cadets’ opinions, based on the answers to this item, demonstrate the existence of strong influences in choosing the profession of officer, coming from family and teachers, which proves the importance of the affective dimension and of the main key representatives of educational responsibility in the Romanian society.

For the next item, in which the respondents were asked to list at least two reasons why they chose the Land Forces Academy and not another military institution of higher education,

we have identified a wide range of reasons. Among these, the most frequently formulated were: the reputation enjoyed by the academy; the possibility to choose from several branches and military specialties; the emphasis laid on general military training; the opportunity to become a very good commanding officer; the skills and pleasure to attend this institution; the intense physical training program; combining educational and practical activities; the influence of friends' opinion; the opportunity to reach operationalized units across the country; the conditions offered by the Academy. These main responses and others that have been identified demonstrate that the academy is an institution that provides quality academic and military training, offering students the opportunity for a comprehensive military training to ensure their success in the officer career and a distribution as close to their own aspirations as possible.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Conducting this research among military students highlighted particularly important issues to be considered when assuming the responsibility for the quality of the actions preceding the election of the officer profession, respectively of the Academies and force categories of the Romanian Army and of the activities aimed at improving academic military education targeting the professional training of the Romanian officer.

The variety of the opinions determined by the typological diversity of the personality of the students, built in educational, social, emotional, military or civilian environments, left their mark on the formation of common or individual psychological traits, but focus on the views and attitudes needed for the profession of officer at the Land Forces Academy. Education and communication in the family, the training of the occupational skills and the moral qualities acquired in college or high school visibly mark the options for a military career, in contrast with the influences from the media, groups of friends and even some relatives.

We believe that identifying, adapting and applying the most appropriate educational strategies in family and school, the formation of a correct public opinion favorable to supporting the profession of officer and a new vision of the role and functions of the public opinion regarding the fundamental interests of defense and security, each separately and all together, can and must compete in creating an optimal environment for training a large number of young people wanting to pursue an officer career, and for the officer of the Romanian Army to become a military personality with a high liability to the national and international interests.

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