

The USAWC Strategy Model in Moldova: Developing the Master's Course (Level II PME) for Military and Civilian Professionals

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Context: NATO Assistance to Moldova

Beginning in 2009, a multinational team of NATO professional military education (PME) experts began providing assistance to the Republic of Moldova's Armed Forces at the Moldovan Military Institute (later Academy [MMA]) in Chisinau. The team's broad purpose was to help the Moldovan military adjust from a Soviet-style military educational system to one that more closely mirrored NATO and Western standards. While constitutionally a neutral country, Moldova is a Partnership for Peace (PfP) Consortium member and participant in the Defense Education Enhancement Program (DEEP). As part of the DEEP process, the NATO team, co-led by Colonel (Ret.) John F. Troxell of the USAWC's Strategic Research Department, was initially charged with two major efforts.

The first was revamping the "Basic Course," the bachelor's degree producing (Level I) course already being taught at MMA in a four-year curriculum that produced officers commissioned in the Moldovan National Army. According to COL Troxell, "The most ambitious recommendation was to develop a senior officers' course, including a Master's degree (Level II) program. At the time of the assessment visit, there was no additional military education available in Moldova beyond a junior staff officers' course." The "Senior Course" (referred to henceforth as the "Master's Course") thus had no precedent and was to be developed from scratch. Its purpose was to afford more senior military officers and their civilian equivalents the opportunity to obtain a master's degree in an integrated national security program that more closely conformed to NATO standards.

In November 2009 the DEEP team rolled up its collective sleeves and began work on both efforts. While one multinational team assisted the Moldovans in redesigning the curriculum for the Basic Course, a second began designing the Master's Course. It consisted of Mr. Mark Montesclaros, representing the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and LTC Costel Simion, Romanian Army, from the National Defence University (NDU) in Bucharest. (LTC Simion was later replaced by LTC Florian Circiumaru, Romanian Army, also representing NDU.) The purpose of this issue paper is to describe some of the key issues, events and lessons learned from assisting Moldovan Military Academy (MMA) officials in creating this new course.

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The author meets with LTC Sergiu Plop (right) and LTC Ghenadie Safonov, MMA, Chisinau, Moldova, 18 Nov 2009



LTC Costel Simion and DEEP team discuss design of Master's Course with LTC Plop, MMA, 27 May 2010

The Three-Legged Stool in Moldova: Designing the Master's Course

Design for the new Level II program began in November 2009 as DEEP team members Mark Montesclaros and LTC Simion met with MMA officials LTC Sergiu Plop and LTC Ghenadie Safonov. LTC Plop, Chief of Artillery, was given the lead for development of the Master's program by MMA, with an assist by LTC Safonov, Chief of Signals. The team met over a three-day period to sketch out some preliminary thoughts on the course in terms of design, content and delivery.

In order to help frame the issue, the DEEP team recommended use of COL (RET) Art Lykke's strategy model, taught at the U.S. Army War College and other U.S. PME institutions. Lykke's "three-legged stool" model and its ends-ways-means-risk formulation provided the basis for the initial brainstorm session, shown in the extracts below in both Moldovan (Romanian) and English.

Cadrul de analiză a problemei - Model strategic

- **Finalități** (Ce? – obiective, finalități, scopuri)
- **Căi** (Cum? - Concepte)
- **Mijloace** (Cu ce? – Resurse - bani, personal, timp, decizii politice, etc.)
- **Riscuri** (Discrepanțele dintre finalități, căi și mijloace)

Framework to Analyze Problem - Strategy Model

- **Ends** (What? – Objectives, end state, goals)
- **Ways** (How? – Concepts)
- **Means** (With what? – Resources- money, people, time, political will, etc.)
- **Risk** (Imbalances between ends-ways-means)

Excerpts from original Master's Course brainstorming slides, 16 Nov 2009, incorporating USAWC strategy model, Chisinau, Moldova

As may be expected, much initial discussion centered on the "ends," in other words, MMA's expectations for course graduates in terms of their capabilities, knowledge and required skills. This vision would then drive curricular requirements, which would in turn provide the basis for much nuts-and-bolts work by MMA's staff and faculty in the subsequent months. After significant discussion, the team settled on the following vision statement:

To produce a mid-level (MAJ-LTC-Civilian) national security professional capable of solving complex problems related to defense and national security issues facing the Republic of Moldova.

From the start, MMA officials were intent on a program that could produce military graduates capable of jobs ranging from battalion command to higher level staff positions within the armed services as well as in the Moldovan Ministry of Defense (MOD). They also wanted to attract civilian professionals who could serve in the MOD or in the interior or foreign affairs ministries.

The DEEP team then turned to the question of concepts or “ways” using the Lykke model—in other words, how could the Moldovans accomplish the ends stated above? The team discussed the various resident and non-resident options, including some that Moldovan officers had attended such as Romania’s National Defence University, the Baltic Defence College in Estonia, and the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The Romanian option seemed particularly appealing; Romania is located on Moldova’s western border and the two countries share a common language. At this point in 2009, however, Romanian-Moldovan defense cooperation was minimal at best due to a tenuous political climate; this was to change significantly over the course of the next several years. In the end, MMA officials decided that a resident course in Moldova, conducted in Chisinau at MMA facilities, was the preferred “way” regarding the Master’s Course. They also desired to have a non-resident option (ADL) to supplement the resident course. Of course, all of this meant that MMA would have to generate the “means” to underpin this ambitious undertaking; at the time, its staff and faculty were already fully engaged with the Basic Course and had no prior experience with a master’s level program.



NATO DEEP Team with Moldovan Military Academy (MMA) Staff, 27 May 2010, in Chisinau. LTC Costel Simion is at far left, front row. Mr. Mark Montesclaros is 3rd from right, front row.

the new course. In order to meet the MMA vision as well as incorporate the most applicable elements of the NATO reference curricula, the DEEP-MMA team developed two tracks, a National Defense and Security Track for military or civilian professionals, and a Military Art Track designed primarily for military officers. While much of the two tracks were similar, the latter placed additional emphasis on joint and multinational operations as well as campaign planning. Both tracks included key elements of the NATO reference curricula, including leadership, ethics, civil-military relations, the media, critical thinking, public administration, defense planning and resource management, multi-cultural awareness and theory of war and strategy. In addition, MMA officials added several courses such as foreign language, computer skills, and research methods. Both tracks were to be completed within a fifteen-month time frame, including a dissertation and its defense.

In addition to the curriculum, the team discussed other “means,” including the faculty, the method of delivery, and the physical plant. In short, the military and civilian faculty of MMA would be the primary instructors for the Master’s Course, supplemented by faculty from civilian universities within the Republic of Moldova, as well as subject matter experts from NATO countries. MMA classrooms would be used to teach the first course, which was designed as a graduate-style seminar based on the adult learning model. Since the first cohort was expected to be in the range of 16-20 students, the DEEP team recommended a mix of military and civilians—the military to be represented by officers from the Army, Air Force, Border Guard and Carabinieri, while civilians representing the Ministries of Defense, Interior and Foreign Affairs were highly desired to add depth and breadth to the seminar.

The team spent much of the three-day session discussing the “means” required to support the new program. This was a broad category encompassing the curriculum, the faculty, the physical plant and other key resources. Regarding the curriculum, the DEEP team benefited from the NATO-produced reference curricula already developed, one for a “Generic Officer Professional Military Education” and the other for “Defence Institution Building.” A Moldovan officer, LTC Sergiu Saramet of MMA, had participated alongside NATO experts in the development of the reference curricula. Additionally, since both DEEP team members had taught at mid-level and senior level military colleges in their respective countries, they provided their experiences and insight to MMA officials as they brainstormed the curriculum for

A critical but sometimes overlooked component of Art Lykke's strategy model is "risk," which represents an imbalance in the interplay among ends, ways, and means. In the case of the Moldovans, an ends-means mismatch was likely. For example, in moving from a Soviet-era model to a more Westernized one, MMA officials found that they lacked the capacity within their own faculty to teach new disciplines—subjects such as public administration, civil-military relations, defense planning and resource management, joint and multinational operations, and the like. In order to mitigate this risk, MMA pursued options such as hiring new permanent staff and faculty, making use of visiting or adjunct professors from Moldovan institutions of higher learning, and inviting NATO experts to assist with some of the more specialized topics.

MMA officials also incurred risk in a number of other areas associated with developing the master's program. First, they had an ambitious timeline, desiring to start the first pilot course by September 2011, or within two years. This meant that they had to meet a number of milestones, most importantly approval from the MOD and concurrence from the Ministry of Education that the course met all national requirements for a master's degree program. Next, the course had to comply with the Bologna Accords, the Europe-wide process that defines standards for higher education—to which Moldova subscribes and adheres. Indeed, the Bologna Process was an overarching constraint (a "must do" in U.S. joint terminology) that played a significant role in shaping the program. Lastly, MMA had to determine a budget for the course; develop a curriculum, lesson plans, and a course schedule; recruit and train faculty to teach the new course; and determine other resources needed to support it. While MMA incurred significant risk with this ambitious undertaking, its officials had a mitigating strategy that maximized internal (Moldovan) resources as well as continuing support from NATO.

Art Lykke's strategy model thus provided a very useful basis to brainstorm the Moldovan Military Academy's concept for a master's program. The DEEP-MMA team briefed its ends-ways-means-risk analysis to Commandant COL N. Gherbovei on 19 November 2009. COL Gherbovei approved the team's recommendations, provided guidance, and blessed the way ahead.

Forward Progress: Subsequent Actions and the First Iteration of the Master's Course

After a flurry of activity by MMA officials, the DEEP team returned to Moldova in May 2010 and January 2011, continuing assistance to both the Basic and Master's Courses. Mr. Montesclaros, now working with LTC Florian Circiumaru of the Romanian National Defence University, continued his focus on the master's program with MMA's designated project officer and Dean of the Public Administration Faculty, LTC Sergiu Plop. By this time the Moldovans had made significant progress on the milestones established during the initial brainstorming sessions. They had gained MOD concurrence with their plans and were awaiting the Ministry of Education's approval, expected in March 2011. They began advertising their new program to the ministries, hoping to attract a variety of students to the first course. Internally, MMA achieved remarkable progress in a short amount of time—recruiting and training additional faculty members, finalizing their curriculum and writing lesson plans, and receiving outside support where needed from NATO. The latter included subject matter experts visiting MMA on specialized topics such as civil-military relations and critical thinking, as well as familiarization visits by MMA faculty and staff to the United States and Romania.

The course began to take shape as MMA's September 2011 deadline approached. LTC Plop sketched the broad outlines of the course—MMA intended to conduct an iteration of the Master's Course once every two years, employing a combination of MMA and adjunct faculty from universities within Moldova. The program would comply with the provisions of the Bologna Accords, as well as the Moldovan Ministry of Education; thus MMA designed a 900-hour semester consisting of 450 contact and 450 individual student preparation hours. The course included a master's thesis as a graduation requirement. All told, the first course would run from September 2011 to December 2012, with two semesters of study and the remainder for dissertation preparation and defense. In a deviation from previous plans, MMA dispensed with separate military and civilian tracks, simplifying the curriculum into one "Security and Defense" track that applied to both military and civilian students.

According to LTC Plop, perhaps MMA's biggest challenge as it developed the course was balancing the multiple requirements levied upon it. In addition to the DEEP team's recommendations and comments, MMA had to work

within the constraints of the European-wide Bologna Accords, as well as national requirements from the Moldovan Ministry of Education. These latter two in particular caused parts of the initial curricular design to be revised, renamed or eliminated altogether as MMA sought compliance. More importantly, they induced important milestones that focused all of the MMA leadership, as well as marked progress on the path towards implementation. MMA was constantly engaged with Moldovan ministry officials, as well as civilian academics, in order to produce a quality program that met all requirements of a master's degree granting institution. Additionally, the Moldovan Government had to enact legislative changes regarding the civilian specialties that would now be taught by a military institution. In short, MMA was constantly breaking new ground as it prepared to roll out the first master's program in its existence.

In less than two years from the initial brainstorming sessions, MMA stood up the Master's Course, meeting the original milestone and after yeoman's work by academy staff and a host of supportive NATO countries. Mark Montesclaros and LTC Circiumaru returned as a two-person team to again support MMA, but this time in different capacities. Whereas prior visits had focused on providing guidance and recommendations to MMA as it developed the course, visits in November 2011 and December 2012 directly supported the curricular requirements of the master's program itself.

In November 2011, the pair conducted lectures and interaction with MMA faculty and staff, as well as the inaugural class of sixteen officers, 15 from the Army (in the rank of captain to colonel, with mostly majors). One officer represented the Moldovan Border Guard. Since MMA did not have the capacity to teach NATO or US joint operational doctrine or planning, Mr. Montesclaros and LTC Circiumaru filled this gap. LTC Circiumaru led the seminar with an introduction to NATO, its organization and capabilities. He then covered the intricate details of the NATO Operational Planning Process (OPP), as well as the Crisis Response System. Speaking in Romanian, LTC Circiumaru was very well received and engendered significant interaction with the Moldovan students. Mr. Montesclaros then introduced the students to U.S. joint operational doctrine and planning processes (JOPP), using the whiteboard and a number of handouts. Despite the use of sequential translation and occasional language barriers, the session was also well received. It should be noted that a number of Moldovan students had been previously exposed to the military decision making process (MDMP), having attended NATO, Romanian or U.S. schools. Aside from their roles as teachers, the two DEEP members also interacted with MMA officials, receiving an AAR on the Master's Course and getting input on future assistance required from NATO.



Colonel Mihail Buclis, Commandant, Moldovan Military Academy, makes opening remarks at inauguration of the Master's Course, Chisinau, Moldova, September 2011. Members from U.S. Embassy Chisinau and the U.S. Department of Defense Office of Defense Cooperation attended.

Finally, Mr. Montesclaros and LTC Circiumaru returned to Moldova in December 2012 at the invitation of MMA to participate in thesis defense by the first cohort of the Master's Course. Over a three-day process that was heavily prioritized by MMA, the sixteen class members defended their dissertations on a wide range of topics, including the foundations of Moldovan security, reform of the Moldovan military, NATO transformation, and the Trans-Nistrian conflict. In compliance with national educational standards, MMA convened a commission headed by a highly-respected civilian academician and former rector of the State University of Moldova. Other committee members included a second civilian academic from the Moldovan Academy of Science (a research institute), as well as members of the Minister of Defense and MMA. Commandant Mihail Buclis hosted the proceedings, which were formal and rigid in format. Each student in turn defended his thesis, with time left for questioning by commission members. On the final day of defense, the commission recognized each student publicly and assigned a grade on a 1-10 scale. Grades ranged from 8-10 with all students successfully passing, in essence qualifying for graduation. On 24 December, MMA graduated its first cohort of the Master's Course, with Minister of Defense Vitalie Marinuta presenting diplomas.



LTC Circiumaru (right), Mr. Mark Montesclaros(center), and LTC Plop (2d from left) during thesis defense at Moldovan Military Academy, Chisinau, 19 Dec 2012.



First Promotion of the Master's Course, MMA, Chisinau, 24 Dec 2012. Moldovan Defense Minister, Vitalie Marinuta, a graduate of U.S. Army CGSC, is pictured front row center.

Conclusion: The Master's Course Today and Lessons Learned From its Design

The Moldovan Military Academy conducted its second iteration of the Master's Course (now also referred to as the "Security and Defense Course") during the period September 2013 to December 2014. Adjusting the course from its own AARs as well as recommendations from the DEEP team, the second class was much larger and more diverse than the first. Its cohort of 28 students included 15 uniformed personnel from the Army and Air Force. Thirteen civilians represented the Army, the Border Police, the Prison System, MMA and the private sector. Civilian students were generally younger than their military counterparts. Additionally, five of the 28 students were female whereas the first promotion had none. As with the previous iteration, Mr. Montesclaros and COL Circiumaru provided direct support to the Master's Course in December of both 2013 and 2014. The first was as faculty instructors, once again presenting NATO and U.S./joint operational planning and processes. The second was to support the dissertation commission as the 28 students defended their theses on a wide variety of topics. The second cohort graduated on 19 December 2014, with Defense Minister Valeriu Troenco presiding.

MMA has made significant strides since initial meetings with the DEEP team in 2009. The faculty is now conducting its third iteration of the master's program, due to graduate in spring 2016, and plans on conducting future courses annually vice biennially. The Basic Course, totally revamped to a much more Western-style education, graduated its first officer class taught entirely with the new curriculum on 28 June 2015. MMA also developed other courses to increase the professionalism of its forces, ranging from non-commissioned officer PME to a recently inaugurated PhD program. Along the way, MMA had to obtain all the international as well as national certifications and accreditations associated with initiating these ground-breaking programs. In addition, MMA had to break all existing paradigms with its previous military educational system, based on a Cold War, Soviet-style model. Based



COL Florian Circiumaru and Mr. Mark Montesclaros (right) meet with MMA Commandant COL Mihail Buclis and Staff, 12 Dec 2013



COL Circiumaru (right) with COL Buclis, 26 June 2015

on the sum total of its efforts, on 27 June 2015 NATO and the PFP Consortium determined that Moldova “achieved capacity” for the DEEP program, the first of thirteen participants to gain such recognition. As such, Moldova is now able to export its own expertise to assist other nations with PME development.

Since 2009, both Mr. Montesclaros and COL Circiumaru have made numerous trips to Moldova in support of the DEEP effort and in particular the Master’s Course. The former has been to Moldova eight times, while COL Circiumaru, now the Academic Co-Lead for the DEEP-Moldova effort, has made close to twenty trips. Based at Romania’s NDU, COL Circiumaru is well-positioned, both literally and figuratively, to continue these valuable efforts. Bucharest is only an hour’s flight from Chisinau.

So what can be gleaned from the experience of assisting Moldova in its efforts to create a more Westernized PME? Perhaps the first lesson is related to the paradigm shift mentioned earlier. DEEP-Moldova members were not sure what to expect at first. COL Circiumaru states, “Actually it was something like learning by doing. The big challenge was the way we had to act to change their mindset. They were Russian-oriented, starting from almost nothing, and it was quite hard to make them understand that needs had to be balanced with the resources available to them.” From the team’s viewpoint, MMA’s approach was to embrace change and break the paradigm from the former Soviet model. Regarding the Basic Course (the four-year undergraduate course already in existence), this meant significant insertions of new subject matter that had to be incorporated in stride. The Master’s Course, however, had no precedent and thus could be developed from a blank slate. This did not mean that MMA had the capacity to teach all of the new Western-style subjects based on the NATO reference curriculum. It did mean, however, that MMA had to do an ends-means calculus to mitigate any risk in teaching subjects for which the faculty was not prepared. As shown earlier, the USAWC strategy model helped to frame such discussion as the master’s program evolved.

Perhaps the biggest lesson for all was that MMA staff and faculty had to balance competing requirements, and this proved difficult at times. In other words, both the DEEP team and the Moldovans realized that they had to adapt the new curriculum to Moldovan realities. One could not simply transpose a Westernized curriculum onto MMA without careful consideration of all the implications. For example, some topics from the original recommended menu were either revised or simply dropped altogether. Other subjects such as fluency in a second language were added based on the capabilities the Moldovan armed forces wanted in their military graduates. Of course, all of the curriculum had to meet the constraints imposed by the Bologna Process, as well as national requirements levied by the Ministry of Education. Additionally, MOD and the Armed Forces also influenced the development of the master’s program heavily. Thus, while developing their curriculum and recruiting/preparing the faculty to teach the new course, MMA officials were simultaneously seeking formal approval and various scientific as well as academic accreditations to be able to implement the new course. This they did in a remarkably short time—less than two years between initial brainstorming and course start.

That it took a “team effort” goes without saying. While the Moldovans could not have done it alone, MMA was at the epicenter of multiple efforts, all designed to modernize its PME to meet the demands of the 21st century operational environment. Successive MMA Commandants such as COL N. Gherbovei and COL Mihail Buclis provided the leadership, vision and resources, while COL Sergiu Plop was the point man at MMA for the master’s program, leading and directing the staff and faculty in this important new endeavor. Multiple nations supported the DEEP-Moldova effort, providing a wide variety of expertise and encouragement. The NATO academic co-leads, first Colonel Jef Troxell and now COL Florian Circiumaru, continue to provide stimulus and guidance to the process, even after NATO’s recent declaration of capacity for Moldova. Particularly noteworthy is Romania’s contribution, which has grown significantly since 2009. For the DEEP team, Romania was always a partner of choice, given its NATO pedigree and proximity to Moldova. According to COL Circiumaru, “[T]he cooperation was and is still very good. We speak the same language, we have the same origins and common history, and we share the same values.”

While it is uncertain as to what the future holds for DEEP-Moldova, both Mr. Montesclaros and COL Circiumaru look forward to maintaining the relationship that started with uncertain beginnings in 2009. COL Circiumaru states: “Frankly and honestly speaking, I am very attached to this program and I’ll continue to push things to make them feasible and adaptable. I realize now that this is not an easy job and there is much time spent on coordination, but I am very happy for the results.” Mark Montesclaros adds: “It was very gratifying to work with the Moldovans from start to finish on the master’s program. MMA can take pride in how far it has come since 2009 in implementing its vision to transform its PME institutions.”



The authors with the Commandant and key staff of MMA, Chisinau, Moldova, 16 Dec 2013. From left to right LTC (now COL) Ghenadie Safonov, LTC (now COL) Sergiu Plop, LTC (now COL) Florian Circiumaru, COL Mihail Buclis (Commandant), Mr. Mark Montesclaros, COL Iurie Girnet, and LTC Pavel Croitoru.

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