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Non-Governmental Organizations and Social Support for the Military Community: A Dialogue with the CAMARAZII Association

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Abstract

This interview explores the role of the Romanian Army Charity Association – CAMARAZII within Romania's military social work system, highlighting the contribution of non-governmental organizations to supporting active-duty military personnel, veterans, wounded service members, reservists, and their families. The interview examines the principles underpinning the Association's activities, its mechanisms of social intervention, its complementary relationship with public institutions, and the main legislative, institutional, and financial challenges encountered in this field. The discussion emphasizes the importance of the rapid and flexible response provided by civil society organizations in addressing situations of social vulnerability and major crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, it outlines perspectives for the future development of military social work in Romania, with particular emphasis on strengthening cooperation among public authorities, non-governmental organizations, and academia, improving the legislative framework, and expanding social services for veterans and retired military personnel. The interview provides valuable practical insights into the challenges and opportunities within the field, serving as a relevant resource for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers interested in advancing military social work in Romania.

Keywords: CAMARAZII Association, institutional partnership, military personnel, military social work, non-governmental organizations, social support, veterans.

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Introduction

Non-governmental organizations and professional associations of military personnel and veterans represent an important actor in the development and strengthening of modern military social work systems. In numerous NATO and European Union member states, these organizations complement the institutional services provided by public authorities, contributing to the social integration of active-duty military personnel, reservists, veterans and their families, as well as to the promotion of their interests and rights in society. Through social support activities, counselling, representation and the promotion of professional solidarity, such organizations become relevant partners of military institutions and local communities.

In Romania, the field of military social work is undergoing a process of development and consolidation, both from an institutional and an academic perspective. Alongside the specialized structures of the national defence, public order and national security system, an increasingly important role is played by civil society organizations bringing together active-duty military personnel, reservists, veterans and supporters of military values. These organizations contribute to identifying the social needs of beneficiaries, developing community projects and facilitating dialogue between public institutions and the military community.

The Romanian Army Charity Association – CAMARAZII belongs to this category of organizations that promote solidarity, camaraderie and mutual support among members of the military community. Its activities provide a practical perspective on the challenges faced by military personnel and veterans, as well as on the ways in which civil society can contribute to increasing social resilience and improving their quality of life.

Based on these considerations, the Romanian Journal of Military Social Work conducted this interview with representatives of the CAMARAZII Association. The purpose of the interview is to highlight the organization's mission, values and activities, identify the main challenges encountered in supporting the military community, and capture perspectives on the development of military social work in Romania. At the same time, the dialogue seeks to highlight good practices and initiatives that may serve as benchmarks for developing cooperation between public institutions, academia and non-governmental organizations.

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From a methodological perspective, the material takes the form of a semi-structured interview, based on a set of questions developed by the journal's editorial team and addressed to representatives of the CAMARAZII Association. The answers are presented in a form that faithfully preserves the interviewees' expressions, without representing the results of empirical research in the classical sense of the term. Consequently, the opinions expressed belong exclusively to the interviewees and are intended to contribute to understanding practical and organizational aspects relevant to the field of military social work.

The publication of this interview is part of the Romanian Journal of Military Social Work's effort to facilitate dialogue between research and practice, promote the exchange of experience among specialists, and document relevant initiatives that contribute to the development of this interdisciplinary field in Romania.

Interview with Colonel (ret.) Nicolae Anghelescu, Executive President of the Romanian Army Charity Association – CAMARAZII

1. How would you define the role of the Romanian Army Charity Association – CAMARAZII within the military social support ecosystem in Romania?

The Romanian Army Charity Association – CAMARAZII has assumed the role of a non-governmental actor specializing in the social field, operating in a complementary capacity to the mechanisms available to the specialized bodies of the Romanian state, primarily the Ministry of National Defence (MoND). More specifically, at the request of the military institution or other public authorities, on our own initiative or at the request of our members, we intervene to resolve problems falling within the social sphere. These mainly concern cases in which the MoND has no specific legal powers or has such powers but lacks the necessary funds, or cases requiring urgent action when the state's administrative procedures are cumbersome. As a rule, life tends to outpace the regulatory framework. In other words, realities constantly emerge that cannot be addressed by the legal and financial framework of the public system. In such situations, our role is to intervene at the appropriate time and resolve urgent

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matters, given that our decision-making and operational mechanisms are much more flexible than those specific to state authorities.

Depending on the circumstances, the CAMARAZII Association resolves the reported problems in their entirety, depending on their financial scale and the funds available, or assumes responsibility for those aspects that are not eligible for resolution through public resources. These may be urgent matters, but we also undertake long-term or permanent projects.

Through its profile and track record, the Romanian Army Charity Association – CAMARAZII has demonstrated that it is the Ministry of National Defence's most important and steadfast non-governmental partner in the social field, as well as a reliable source of support for military personnel and their families facing various challenges in life and needing organized and effective community assistance. Proof of this is the recognition of its merits by state authorities, the Association having been granted public utility status by Government Decision. This is complemented by a series of distinctions awarded by various military and civilian entities.

2. What were the main motivations behind the consolidation of the CAMARAZII Association's activities in supporting military personnel, veterans and their families?

We have always felt that there is room for greater humanity within military communities, and we are convinced that the military environment must be rigorous, practical and procedural with regard to strictly professional activities. However, we must not forget that beyond uniforms, ranks and hierarchies there are people who, in their personal lives, face problems relatively similar to those of other citizens, and these problems must be addressed both institutionally and through acts of human solidarity. It was within this framework that the concept of "The Military Personnel Member – A Citizen in Uniform" emerged, around which socio-professional relations function in most NATO member states' armed forces.

In other words, with regard to private life, military personnel must be able to exercise the right to freedom of association provided for in the Constitution, naturally without undermining the requirements imposed by their professional status. We have assumed the role of a catalyst for association for the common good in the social sphere. Among other things, we

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are guided by Aristotle's well-known philosophical statement that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts", and we believe in the superior strength, coherence and well-being that group cohesion can generate. Furthermore, we believe that effective social support activities require good management, carried out within a legal, organized and credible framework, and an organization such as the CAMARAZII Association can provide an appropriate environment for this to take place.

Last but not least, our motivation also stems from the fact that, year after year, we have developed this valuable and necessary social undertaking, earning people's respect and trust. We have thus demonstrated that IT CAN BE DONE, and this track record, based on concrete good deeds, together with the collective energies we have managed to mobilize, constitutes in itself a validation and a standard of good practice that motivates us to move forward.

3. To what extent do you consider that NGO-type organizations complement or substitute institutional social work services?

As I emphasized in the very first question, the fundamental idea is that of complementarity between the actions of the state and those of NGOs, so that, in an ideal arrangement, the social problems concerned are resolved as comprehensively as possible. Generally, NGOs specialize in a particular main field of activity, around which several other areas naturally connected to it also revolve. In accordance with its profile, each NGO should maintain systematic contact and dialogue with the specialized state authorities, so that they are aware of one another and coordinate their actions.

Beyond knowing one another and engaging in dialogue, the state and NGOs should operate like the components of the same machine. In other words, they should jointly plan the directions to be followed and the corresponding actions, exchange information, support one another, and maintain a balanced relationship, including in terms of mutual respect. This is an ideal scenario, but in practice things do not always work this way, and an NGO's effectiveness and capacity to intervene depend to a very large extent on how the state, which is incomparably more powerful and plays a decisive role, treats its non-governmental partners with the respect they deserve. There is much to discuss here, but essentially, we know many highly serious NGOs that significantly complement, or even substitute for, the state within the broader picture of

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social intervention needs. The level and quality of this contribution from NGOs vary from case to case, depending on the parameters mentioned above, namely the degree of mutual respect and coordination of action that the social partners involved – the state authorities and the NGO – choose to practise. The contribution of the actual beneficiaries of social support measures must also be taken into account, because their conduct is relevant: there is a difference between being uncooperative and being cooperative.

In our case, given that we have a stable and balanced cooperation relationship with the Ministry of National Defence, things function at a reasonable level. In this regard, judging by the more than 6,000 support measures provided over 18 years of existence, we can conclude that our contribution has been substantial and that we have fulfilled the social mission we assumed. Even if this might seem immodest, we believe it is quite an achievement to be able to state that, over time, we have satisfactorily addressed all requests received from individuals or legal entities, naturally insofar as they were consistent with the law and our internal regulations and within the financial limits of the Association.

In this context, it should be noted that, under the legislation governing the powers, organization and functioning of the Ministry of National Defence, since active-duty personnel must meet certain health standards, the Army does not have a specialized social work structure, with the exception of a few support arrangements for the wounded, disabled and surviving family members of those killed in military operations, as well as for disabled persons, war veterans and war widows. Consequently, the involvement of NGOs in the social field and the cultivation of good relations with specialized civilian entities are options worth pursuing, especially for reservists and retired military personnel, war veterans and military personnel with disabilities.

4. Which categories of beneficiaries are most frequently supported by the CAMARAZII Association, and what types of social vulnerabilities do you encounter most often?

The CAMARAZII Association directs its support measures primarily towards its own members, most of whom come from the military, including reservists and retired military personnel, veterans, the wounded, persons with disabilities and the surviving family members of those killed in military operations. The aforementioned groups also include their family

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members, as well as vulnerable people from outside the military and the Association who find themselves in extreme situations. With regard to social vulnerabilities, we focus on socio-medical assistance, death-related assistance, assistance for damage caused by fires, floods and other natural disasters, and various support measures for orphans. In other words, we focus on those hardships in life that people cannot overcome on their own, or that they would find extremely difficult to overcome.

At the same time, since all these types of support require substantial financial resources, we must take care of the "financial engine" behind our activities. This translates into how many donors, sponsors, contributing members or other categories of contributors we can persuade to stand by us. This is not as easy as it might appear from the outside. The theory that, if you promote a cause effectively, especially a dramatic one, strong public emotion will be generated and donations will then flow into the Association does not hold up, except on a scale far too small to enable you to build something serious, substantial and stable. In other words, the well-known line from the film Filantropica, "The outstretched hand that tells no story receives no alms", produces only limited results in charitable work, at least in Romania. Our experience shows that even the religiosity displayed by the Romanian people is not always confirmed by concrete actions when people are asked to contribute actual money without receiving anything in return. Consequently, without denying the effectiveness of promoting causes through emotional appeal, our philosophy is to build the loyalty of as large a body of members and supporters as possible through various persuasion mechanisms based on seriousness, concrete actions, legality and transparency, so that we can accumulate the resources needed to provide the assistance mentioned earlier. What matters is that we fulfil our objectives every year and have the financial means to develop and diversify our social support system.

It is important to mention that the ratio between those who receive various forms of assistance and those who contribute funds is such that more than 90% are contributors who receive nothing from the Association. To keep these people close to us, we organize various group cohesion activities as part of a broader programme called "Coezio", which includes trips, children's camps, recreational and cultural activities, and similar events. This is a formula through which we ensure both the Association's financial balance and greater social

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harmony within communities. At the same time, this symbiosis also contributes to people's civic education, because otherwise, if they remained isolated, they would not be able to experience the satisfaction of knowing that good things can happen around them and that they can be part of them.

5. How are social cases identified, and what is the intervention mechanism (cooperation with military units, public institutions and informal networks)?

The main way in which social cases are identified is through people who, knowing about our existence and the Association's profile, contact us directly when they encounter social problems. The Ministry of National Defence also sends us requests for intervention in situations where the institution is overwhelmed by problems affecting a particular individual or social group. Last but not least, the Association takes the initiative when, following events reported in the press or on social media, it identifies issues requiring its intervention, either for moral reasons, in the case of tragic accidents, for example, or because the affected individuals are members of the Association and must receive our support by virtue of the rights arising from its Statute and Internal Regulations.

A crucial element that ensures that people know about us and that we find out what is happening to them in the field lies in our public communication and information policies. We place great importance on transparency and, in this respect, communicate periodically with all Army units and inform interested parties about our main activities, by category of social intervention and project. We generate and maintain systematic dialogue on the Association's main ongoing and future activities, so that we can also take the views of military communities into account when planning our future activities. We do not neglect social networks; we are concerned with maintaining a strong presence on our website and Facebook, we also use the Ministry of National Defence's internal information network, within the limits permitted by the military institution, and periodically publish articles in the newspaper Observatorul Militar, etc.

We attach particular importance to direct communication with those requesting social support, endeavouring to provide solutions adapted to their specific circumstances.

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In this regard, we wish to emphasize that absolutely all applicants, whether individuals or legal entities, receive a written response promptly or within a reasonable period of time. This response is well structured and explains how their requests have been addressed. At the end, we ask them to provide feedback so that we can ensure that the case has been closed on mutually satisfactory terms.

Thus, we can say that, through all the channels mentioned above, to which we can add audiences, various events, informal activities, etc., we maintain a state of connectivity with realities on the ground, which enables us to act promptly and effectively.

6. What are the main structural or systemic difficulties you observe in supporting military personnel and veterans in Romania (legislative, financial and institutional)?

First of all, in order to answer this question, we need to clarify the main terms of our discussion. When we talk about veterans, it should be pointed out that there are two categories: war veterans and their widows, on the one hand, and veterans of theatres of operations and the surviving family members of those who died in such military operations, on the other.

Unfortunately, only a few hundred people from the first category are still alive, given that the average age in this social group is over 90. With regard to these individuals, it should be said that, after 1989, through the efforts of the National Association of War Veterans, the Ministry of National Defence and other state institutions, the specific legislation was gradually improved, enabling these venerable veterans to benefit from allowances, life annuities and front-service bonuses, in addition to other specific entitlements. It is debatable whether these entitlements are sufficiently substantial to represent an adequately calibrated gesture of gratitude on the part of society in recognition of the veterans' sacrifice on the front lines of the Second World War. In any case, there was a great deal of bureaucracy and, I do not hesitate to say, considerable hypocrisy on the part of state representatives who, on the one hand, publicly paid tribute to war veterans and appeared alongside them for image-related reasons, while, on the other hand, blocked various legislative proposals intended to improve their rights in the Government or Parliament, invoking the inadequacy of state resources. One great advantage for war veterans was the establishment of the National Association of War Veterans, which was a strong and functional organization at the time. In practice, the Association pushed matters

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forward with sufficient strength and consistency to prevent too many interruptions in ensuring the rights due to these distinguished war veterans.

As regards the second category, namely veterans of theatres of operations, the first more comprehensive regulation concerning them was Emergency Ordinance No. 82 of 25 October 2006 on the recognition of the merits of military personnel participating in military operations and the granting of certain rights to them and to the surviving family members of those who died. This was a transitional period: Romania was already a NATO member but had not yet joined the European Union, and the country's experience in this field was almost non-existent. Consequently, certain regulatory elements were adopted from the practice concerning war veterans, others from the armed forces of certain reference countries that had been NATO members longer than Romania, together with some elements of domestic thinking. The result was an initial legal framework which, to a considerable extent, was difficult or, in some cases, impossible to implement.

During that period, the CAMARAZII Association was called upon to provide assistance extensively and proved extremely useful to these categories of beneficiaries, since the legislation stipulated certain possibilities for social intervention or even firm state obligations in this field concerning wounded personnel, persons with disabilities, orphans and widows. However, when it came to concrete action, it was often found that either there were no implementing rules, no funds had been budgeted, or certain provisions were ambiguous or in contradiction with national socio-medical legislation. This legislation was gradually improved, and I currently consider it to be a satisfactory regulatory framework that adequately covers the concrete socio-medical cases arising from participation in high-risk military operations. Naturally, here too, as in the case of war veterans, shortcomings such as bureaucracy, lack of legislative clarity and structural inadequacy have been evident. For many years, there were no minimum structures specifically responsible for managing issues concerning wounded and disabled military personnel and the surviving family members of those who died. Here, as in the case of war veterans, NGOs specializing in this field also play an important role. A few years ago, an association focused exclusively on this area was established, namely the

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Association of Veteran Military Personnel and Veterans with Disabilities, which is very active in relation to the system of specific rights of these categories.

In the context of this question, it should be said that social dialogue is more complicated for military personnel than for civilians, because Romanian military personnel do not have the right to associate in trade union-type structures, and Romania does not have an Army Ombudsman institution (a kind of people's advocate for military personnel). By way of comparison, many allied armed forces have such bodies representing and defending military personnel's rights, some of them having both mechanisms available. Romanian military personnel have only one administrative means of requesting and defending their rights in relation to the state, namely addressing their superiors, personally and through the chain of command. Given that the hierarchy in the Army is quite clearly stratified, the processing of such a request can take a long time and involve many obstacles for which ordinary military personnel have no corresponding means of recourse.

7. How do you assess the impact of the humanitarian and social interventions carried out by the CAMARAZII Association on beneficiaries? Are there any indicators or forms of outcome monitoring?

Generally speaking, we consider that one indicator reflecting the extent and quality of our activities is the year-on-year increase in the number of members and supporters and, implicitly, in the funds raised. Another relevant aspect is that we have not encountered any formal challenges, administrative litigation, court proceedings or other problems that might suggest that our directions of action and conduct are inappropriate. On the contrary, we feel appreciated and encouraged.

Considering that, following an assessment by the Government of Romania, our Association was recognized as an organization of public utility, taking into account the numerous distinctions received over time and, above all, the large number and diversity of our social interventions, we believe that we have brought about necessary changes in the Army's social landscape, with beneficial effects on group cohesion and the psycho-moral climate within military communities.

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As regards methods of monitoring outcomes, we give priority to communication with people, both individually, when they contact us with various requests or send us suggestions for improving our activities, and through face-to-face dialogue during periodic visits to military units, audiences, etc. We do not use a technical monitoring and evaluation system because what we do cannot be quantified mathematically. This is because these socio-medical issues require a certain degree of discretion regarding the public disclosure of the problems faced by people with serious illnesses, for example, and involve many nuances that cannot be adequately captured through a monitoring questionnaire. On the other hand, the resources available to us do not allow us to have a specialized structure for sociological research or anything of that kind, but we do not deny the necessity and effectiveness of these measurement and feedback instruments.

It is clear that we need to develop direct communication with our members and supporters. To this end, alongside established tools, we are working on a social communication platform in the form of an internal network, designed to enable people to become better acquainted with what the Association does and intends to do, to express their opinions, and to communicate both with one another through initiative groups on various topics of common interest and with us, as administrators of this communication network, in an interactive manner. In practice, beyond our established areas of activity, we will draw from this interaction with people the elements needed to make adjustments and improvements to the Association's work.

8. How has the recent context (external missions, geopolitical tensions and social crises) influenced the requests addressed to your organization?

Since we are discussing the broader context, it should be mentioned that the Romanian Army Charity Association – CAMARAZII was established in 2008, primarily because there was a need for a strong and serious non-governmental entity capable of contributing to solving the many problems that had emerged at that time, in the context of Romania's participation in high-risk military operations in international theatres of operations.

Even domestic military operations, particularly those involving aviators, had become more dangerous, against the background of more intensive and complex training in an allied

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context. At that time, the Army was still flying MIG aircraft, some of which were technologically outdated and in a state of maintenance that was not entirely appropriate to the new challenges.

At that time, the Association was called upon to intervene extensively, because the increased complexity of the Army's missions, combined with technology that was failing to keep pace, unfortunately generated many tragic incidents resulting in deaths, injuries, disabilities, orphans and widows. As I mentioned in response to an earlier question, it was not only technology that was lagging behind, but also the specific legislation. Consequently, however much the state might have wanted to, it was unable to address all aspects of these cases and, naturally, also turned to NGOs.

Beyond this initial context, which influenced the requests addressed to our organization, there were other crisis situations in which, in addition to our regular annual activities, we had to become involved rapidly and substantially. I can give at least two examples: the COVID crisis and the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. At the beginning of the COVID pandemic, namely at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, when people were terrified by the virulence and rapid spread of the epidemic and state authorities did not know what to tackle first or where to begin, our Association rapidly purchased protective masks, disinfectants, protective suits for medical personnel and other items needed to fight the virus. We named that project "Combat COVID-19". Within this project, after distributing protective equipment wherever it was most urgently needed, we moved on to another equally necessary component. We supported children in pursuing online education by purchasing and donating tablets and laptops, particularly to families with several children and low incomes who could not afford such equipment.

With regard to the war in Ukraine, shortly after the fateful day of 24 February 2022, we needed to show solidarity with our Ukrainian neighbours and friends and contribute to equipping the transit centres established at the border with Ukraine with mattresses, blankets and other accommodation materials, as well as food and water. In the same way, having rapid decision-making and intervention mechanisms, as well as a high degree of credibility, we joined the efforts of the state authorities, particularly by fulfilling the legal procedures required to attract donations and sponsorships to serve this cause.

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The Association's involvement has been valuable not only in crisis situations but also when an atypical challenge arose, such as the "INVICTUS" project, to which Romania was invited to join other allied and partner countries in 2017. INVICTUS is a project promoting sport for people with disabilities, with sport serving as a means of rebuilding oneself after an accident resulting in physical impairment. Wounded and disabled military personnel were part of this challenge and represented Romania excellently. In its first editions (2017–2018), NGOs, primarily the CAMARAZII Association, played an essential role in securing the necessary resources, until the state established its own legal funding and procurement mechanisms to provide logistical support for the project.

As a general observation, in such situations it is important for state authorities to be able to access verified and credible non-governmental partnership options without excessive hesitation. These should inspire strength and confidence in terms of their status, legality and track record, and organizations with public utility status should be at the top of the list.

Therefore, NGOs that have acquired public utility status, having been assessed and recognized by the Government of Romania as high-performing organizations, should be treated accordingly and benefit from a corresponding level of attention and cooperation on the part of the state, which does not always happen. We will elaborate on this subject in the following questions.

9. What do you consider to be the development priorities for the field of military social work in Romania over the coming years?

As I have already mentioned, when we speak about military personnel, both military and civilian, we are referring to people who can serve in military structures only if they meet the medical fitness standards specific to the military environment of the Army. It is true that among the employees of the Ministry of National Defence there are also people who, for a certain period of time or permanently, have particular health problems. However, their number is so small in relation to the Army as a whole that the establishment of permanent specialized social work structures within the military institution is not justified. There are a few elements of this kind within the military organization, but they are limited in number and small in scale, designed only to provide support to military personnel wounded during various missions.

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On the other hand, from a strictly social perspective, it should be said that Army personnel benefit from financial entitlements and other facilities, meaning that there are relatively few individuals or families facing serious social problems because of low incomes. Along this line, just as from a medical perspective, the small number of individuals or families unable to provide for their basic needs does not justify establishing a social work institution within the Army to support them.

By contrast, when we discuss reservists and retired military personnel, war veterans and wounded military personnel, social work assistance is necessary, because these are elderly people and/or people with disabilities, some of whom have low pensions and health problems specific to old age, and sometimes have no family members to support them.

The positive aspect is that, after leaving the military system, former Army employees generally join various NGOs and, through these organizations, bring together certain social support measures wherever necessary. In this area, there is a need for organized forms of support for military pensioners, through the Ministry's encouragement of the establishment of one or more residential centres for elderly people or of authorized service providers that can become involved by providing social or socio-medical services at home, facilitating access to medical care and promoting principles specific to active ageing, in order to prevent social isolation. There are several stronger associations and foundations with such objectives which, given their status as public utility organizations, would be entitled to receive, free of charge, buildings managed by state bodies for social purposes. We have attempted such an initiative several times and will continue to do so. The possibility of accessing European funds could also be added to this undertaking, but matters are not simple. Our organization's conclusion, based on concrete and repeated attempts, is that public authorities have a very strong reflex to retain in their own assets various buildings and plots of land belonging to the state's public domain, sometimes for decades and without any specific purpose, while rejecting applications from NGOs entitled to take over those properties in order to give them a social purpose.

Therefore, we believe that the main priority of the military institution in the field of social work should be to strengthen its relationship with NGOs specializing in the social field

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that have demonstrated their capacity over time and could constitute a constant and reliable source of support if joint efforts were made by the state and the private sector in this area.

Furthermore, for military personnel participating in high-risk operations, it would be useful to have specific regulations and clearly regulated specialized organizational structures that remain inactive but can be operationalized in such situations. These structures should include at least one association or foundation with a strategic role, through which some of the support measures could be implemented whenever necessary.

10. What recommendations would you give to researchers and practitioners in the field of military social work to strengthen cooperation between academia and practice?

Social work is one of the most complex and sensitive fields influencing the course of Romanian society. This can be seen with the naked eye by walking down the street, using public transport, passing through various communities and, above all, following televised debates or social media posts. It is a highly dynamic subject that influences the mood and social conduct of our people. Unfortunately, however, in the "good Romanian tradition", there is much discussion and little action. On the one hand, we have a state suffocated by its own bureaucratic creation, prone to populism and emergency-style solutions; on the other hand, there is a population marked by decades of communism and by the effort of transitioning to democracy, facing serious social problems and having high expectations of state authorities.

Almost daily, we can see the familiar image of a state overwhelmed by reality, or a state that moves from one extreme to another, excessively and sometimes chaotically regulating those areas in which misconduct occurs.

Last but not least, it is quite obvious to those in the NGO sector that the state displays a certain degree of arrogance, both in matters of dialogue and mutual respect and in the way it regulates various aspects of social life and establishes the coercive mechanisms through those regulations.

There is much to discuss here, but I have encountered many incomplete or ambiguous provisions in this area, starting with the regulation of volunteering, which is a joke in Romania (although the law was adopted in 2014, it has no implementing regulations), continuing with the more recent and highly demanding regulation of residential centres for elderly people, and

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including the legislation governing associations and foundations, which contains many unnecessary provisions but fails to regulate a number of absolutely essential aspects from the applicant's perspective, etc.

I have outlined the context in which we find ourselves because it is relevant, and I will now turn to recommendations. I have great respect for social work practitioners because this is a difficult and poorly paid field, and they work, in practice, on the basis of legislation that is sometimes impossible to implement in its entirety. This is either because the regulations are too demanding in relation to Romania's actual capabilities or because, in many cases, the requirements imposed by the legislation are not accompanied by the necessary financial allocations to make their implementation possible. This leads to a situation in which people have to be creative at their own risk.

My recommendation to them would be that, when interacting with monitoring and supervisory authorities or with the press, they should express their thoughts, based on their practical experience in the field, with great courage, because they are entitled to do so. Only in this way will senior decision-makers become aware of and take into consideration what is happening on the ground. Furthermore, beyond the necessary vocation, practitioners must demonstrate humanity in their relationships with those they protect, because without this ingredient things cannot improve.

For the respected academic community, my main recommendation is to give the practical training component in social work institutions as much weight as possible. The mere adoption and perpetuation of theoretical concepts that sound good, many of them based on the experience of much more advanced countries, such as those in Western Europe, places scientific work outside the framework of engagement with Romanian reality and, very probably, in the realm of ineffectiveness.

We believe that the involvement of academia, together with practitioners, is absolutely necessary in persuading legislative bodies to regulate the field of social work more effectively, so that it becomes more flexible, more nuanced and, implicitly, more feasible. Those in positions of authority in this field must understand that abrupt reforms do not take hold in Romania, and that they need to create a workable conceptual and regulatory framework with gradual

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applicability, making it feasible for all applicants who have good intentions and the capacity to act. Otherwise, we will find ourselves in a situation in which the actions of three types of entities (legislative bodies, academic bodies and practitioners) will produce a negative result, even if each party can demonstrate, through procedural arguments, that it has done its job properly in its own way. The essence of our recommendation is the need for communication, mutual respect and, above all, respect for the beneficiaries of social work, greater institutional modesty instead of the arrogance I mentioned, and courageous initiatives coming from people who have empathy and a connection with this system and who no longer wish to see it drifting in a grey area.

Speaking of the grey area, social work must not be approached simplistically, as if the situation were merely that there are people who suffer, people with disabilities, poor people, elderly people, vulnerable individuals in general, and that all we need to do is ensure a minimum level of subsistence so that they can somehow get through life.

Social work must be viewed as part of a much broader system of social support for these people. A well-known proverb attributed to Chinese culture comes to mind: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime!"

An essential element of a healthy society is participatory conduct, meaning that the state provides as much as it can, but the vulnerable individual must also be actively involved in this process of rebuilding. Here, we can consider the development and proper management of the concept of social economy or active ageing, so that the beneficiary of social support measures also makes a personal contribution, to the extent possible. More precisely, I am referring to the fact that some vulnerable people could work under certain conditions and within certain limits, or could engage in volunteering. The idea is that they should not simply sit and wait for the state and NGOs to provide them with everything.

There are many other ways, complementary to meeting basic needs, through which a vulnerable person can become stronger physically, psychologically and materially, if helped to overcome the stage of deep depression. Here, I am referring particularly to counselling and guidance, and to making their lives easier by helping them navigate bureaucratic procedures they are unfamiliar with. Therefore, social work should not focus solely on food,

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accommodation and medication; it is far more complex than that and must be treated accordingly.

I conclude this interview by expressing my conviction that social work is a field that clearly needs to be reformed in the direction of greater flexibility and efficiency, but not through televised debates and politicized approaches. Instead, reform should be achieved through rational dialogue involving all social actors who have something to contribute in this area. The difference between the "grey area" in which it currently finds itself and a reasonably satisfactory system can be made, first and foremost, by the people working within the system, through their honesty and dedication, but also by NGOs, which can bring those necessary, useful and encouraging splashes of colour. I also place great hopes in those who are currently students and who will very probably bring with them an additional measure of enthusiasm, clarity and hope when they begin their careers as social work professionals.

Conclusions

The experience of the Romanian Army Charity Association – CAMARAZII demonstrates that the partnership between the Ministry of National Defence and civil society organizations can generate flexible social interventions adapted to realities on the ground. The more than 6,000 support measures provided during its 18 years of activity constitute a relevant indicator of the contribution made by the organization in supporting military personnel, veterans, wounded personnel, reservists and their families.

The interview highlights the fact that the main challenges in this field are not determined exclusively by the lack of financial resources, but also by legislative, bureaucratic and institutional difficulties that limit the effectiveness of social interventions. In this context, non-governmental organizations play an essential role through their ability to respond rapidly, mobilize resources and build relationships of trust with beneficiaries.

Another important conclusion is the need to strengthen cooperation between public authorities, academia and non-governmental organizations. The development of military social work requires not only improvements to the regulatory framework but also the effective use of the practical experience accumulated by organizations directly involved in supporting the

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military community. In this respect, scientific research can benefit significantly from practitioners' expertise, while research findings can provide a basis for more effective public policies and social programmes.

At the same time, the dialogue reveals the need to develop social services specifically dedicated to reservists and retired military personnel, war veterans and people with disabilities resulting from participation in missions, including through the establishment of community services, residential centres and active ageing programmes, developed in partnership with public utility organizations.

Overall, the interview confirms that military social work must be approached in an interdisciplinary and collaborative manner, in which professional solidarity, institutional responsibility and the involvement of civil society work together to increase the resilience of the military community and improve beneficiaries' quality of life. The experience of the CAMARAZII Association provides a relevant example of good practice and constitutes a valuable source of reflection for researchers, practitioners and decision-makers interested in developing this field in Romania.

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