
**Letter of General Ion Ionita, Minister of the Armed Forces, to Nicolae Ceausescu
By General Ion Ionita**

To Comrade

NICOLAE CEAUSESCU

GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PARTY

PRESIDENT OF THE STATE COUNCIL

On 3 and 4 March 1970, Colonel General Ion Gheorghe, first deputy of the Minister of Armed Forces and Chief of the General Staff, accompanied by Colonel General Marin Niculescu, deputy of the Minister of Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Octavian Orban, and Lieutenant General Gheorghe Lefter, held discussions in Moscow with Marshal I.I. Jakubovsky, Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces and Army General S.M. Stemenko, Chief of the General Staff of the Unified Armed Forces, on the concept on which the common exercise intended to take place on the territory of the Socialist Republic Romania in April, 1970, under the leadership of the [Romanian] Ministry of Armed Forces is to be based, and – especially – on the need to conclude a convention between the governments of the Socialist Republic Romania and of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, respectively.

General Ion Gheorghe, together with his companions, was received once by Army General Stemenko and twice by Marshal Jakubovsky. The discussions lasted for a total of five hours, of which three hours with Marshal Jakubovsky.

After Colonel General Ion Gheorghe briefed the audience on the main elements of the exercise concept, he went on to show that – in accordance with the laws of our country – for the exercise to take place the conclusion of bilateral conventions is necessary between the governments of the Socialist Republic Romania and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on the one hand, and between the governments of the Socialist Republic Romania and the Bulgarian People's Republic, on the other side; these conventions have to be ratified, on behalf of the Romanian side, by the General Assembly of the Socialist Republic Romania.

1. Within the framework of the discussions, Marshal I.I. Jakubovsky and Army General S.M. Stemenko pointed out, in essence, the following:

- In the practice that has been applied so far, for the execution of the exercise no such conventions have been concluded; no state, including the Socialist Republic of Romania, made such a request when its troops or commandments participated in exercises and shooting in the shooting-ranges on the territory of other states;
- From a legal point of view, the Supreme Commander and the Chief of General Staff follow the guidelines in the documents approved at the Budapest Conference in March, 1969. In the Statute of the Unified Armed Forces and of the Unified Commandment, Articles 11 and 25, there is no stipulation to the effect that – for the common exercises to take place – the conclusion of such conventions is necessary. When the Draft Statute was drawn up, nobody required the inclusion of such a provision, in spite of the fact that the Declaration of the Great Assembly of the SR Romania had been adopted on August 22, 1968, that is to say

before the Statute was signed.

· It is true that each state has its own laws, which have to be observed, but – since in the USSR there is no law stipulating the conclusion of a convention in such situations – “neither Stemenko, nor Jakubovsky or Grechko” can propose to the Soviet government that they be authorized to conclude it.

Winding up, Marshal Jakubovsky pointed out that “the conclusion of a convention between governments cannot even be contemplated”.

Marshal Jakubovsky and Army General Stemenko asserted that, under various pretexts, we actually do not want exercises to take place on the territory of our country in which troops from other armies participate; if in 1969 they understood the reasons why the common exercise provided could not take place, now they are of the opinion that the conditioning of its execution is premeditated in order that it cannot take place.

They proposed that, for the law existing in the SR Romania to be observed, in their opinion instead of specifying in the conventions the data referring to the participation in the exercise – on the territory of our country – of the commandments of the armies of the USSR and the Bulgarian PR, such data should be either inscribed on the map of the exercise or constitute a separate appendix to the map, in accordance with their practise in their relationships with the armies of the other states participating in the Warsaw Treaty.

The proposal was justified with arguments in the sense that the exercise will not even be executed with troops since on the part of the Soviet army only an operative group of a division commandment, composed of 30 to 40 officers, will participate, and the command of the large military unit from the Bulgarian army will enter only 3 to 4 km on the territory of the SR Romania.

That is why it would be sufficient that the documents drawn up this way be signed by the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of SR Romania and the Chief of General Staff of the Unified Commandment, and approved by the Government of SR Romania in accordance with the provisions of our country’s constitution.

2. During the discussion, Army General S.M. Stemenko reproached us for the fact that in the last few months a negative position on our part has been noticed, and gave the following examples in that sense:

- Our country did not participate in the exercise in July this year, which took place in the Hungarian People’s Republic;
- We did not make any observations about the draft statute of the representatives of the Supreme Commandment;
- We did not agree to the drawing up of common instructions in regard to the keeping of secrets;
- We did not let them know the data referring to the conclusion of the protocol regarding the development of the armed forces for the period 1971-1975.

Marshal I.I. Jakubovsky added that we did not want to take part in the exercise with troops which is to take place in the German DR in September this year.

3. In his speech, Colonel General Ion Gheorghe put forward our position in accordance with the approved point of view, and – in essence – pointed out that:

· The issue of concluding bilateral conventions with a view to execute common exercises is not new. It was raised for the first time in 1968 by the representatives of the SR Romania on the occasion of various conferences and meetings.

It is true that we participated with troops and commandments in the exercises and other activities outside the territory of our country without concluding conventions, but we acted this way because we had been requested to do so. If, in the future, the issue of concluding conventions for the participation in exercises and shootings on the shooting-ranges is raised, we will agree to conclude them.

· Art. 10 in the Statute of the Unified Armed Forces and of the Unified Commandment stipulates as follows: “The Supreme Commander... with the accord of the ministers of defense, and – if need be – of the governments as well, organizes and executes activities within the framework of the Unified Armed Forces, intended for increasing their combat readiness and mobilizing them.” In our opinion, among the activities designed to increase the combat readiness, there are also the joint exercises. The procedure of marking on the operational map some details referring to the participating foreign troops cannot replace the convention provided in the Romanian legislation.

Winding up, [Colonel General Ion Gheorghe] pointed out that without the conclusion of a convention between governments no joint exercise can take place on the territory of our country.

In connection with the reproaches expressed by Army General S.M. Stemenko, Colonel General Ion Gheorghe indicated that we fulfil the obligations we assume, including those in the plan with common activities, and in some cases also the requirements made outside the plan.

4. At the express request of Marshal I.I. Jakubovsky, on the second day of the discussions the plan of the joint exercise was presented to him. He asserted that it was an interesting conception and expressed his regret that it would not be possible to execute it.

5. At the end of the discussions, Marshal I.I. Jakubovsky requested Colonel General Ion Gheorghe to let the minister of armed forces and, if possible, comrade Nicolae Ceausescu, know his request that the common exercise be executed without concluding any conventions. He added that he looked forward to receiving a reply from us.

Colonel General Ion Gheorghe assured him that he would transmit his request, concurrently pointing out that he saw no possibility of executing the joint exercise without concluding conventions as the laws of our country are observed by all of its citizens alike.

The discussions took place in a calm, normal atmosphere. The moderate and attentive attitude of Marshal I.I. Jakubovsky is to be noted.

6. Since Marshal I.I. Jakubovsky asked that his opinion be made known to me and to you, and that he waited for an answer, I propose to let him know that our point of view remained unchanged and that, consequently, the execution of the joint exercise is conditioned by the conclusion of the two conventions.

I kindly ask you to approve [my proposal].

MINISTER OF THE ARMED FORCES
OF
THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC ROMANIA

Colonel General Ion Ionita

[Source: Arhivele Militare Romane (henceforth AMR) [Romanian Military Archives], Fund V2, vol.3, file 15, ff.80-85.DR, vol.2. Translated for PHP by Viorel Buta]