

István Hottó

“WE LIVE IN A HISTORIC SITUATION...” INTERVIEW WITH CHIEF OF DEFENCE GENERAL DR. GÁBOR BÖRÖNDI

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ABSTRACT: Lieutenant General Dr. Gábor Böröndi¹ (he has been a general since 20 August 2023) was appointed chief of the HDF General Staff² as of 4 May 2023 by the head of state – on the proposal of Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky and the government. Since he holds his position as chief of defence, serious and discernible changes and developments have taken place in the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF). During this period burdened with wars, the guaranteeing of Hungary’s security carries new, unprecedented challenges. Therefore, the goal of armed forces development is to create modern, combat-ready, well-armed, complex and digitalised armed forces. In the interview, the author asked the chief of defence how he sees the past, present, and future of the Hungarian Defence Forces, what he thinks about the fundamentals of Hungary’s defence and the experiences and lessons learned from the Russo-Ukrainian War. (The interview was on 2 February 2024.)

KEYWORDS: combat-ready armed forces, new challenges, new armed forces model, military technological modernisation, territorial defence, reserve force, public relations

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¹ General Böröndi has several decades of extensive senior military leadership experience in both national and international contexts; he is a qualified lawyer and military leader with a certificate. He acquired his general staff academic degree at the National War College of National Defense University (Washington D.C.) in 2017.

² The HDF General Staff (GS) is a strategic-level planning-organizing body responsible for preparing Hungary for military defence and also for managing the top and operational-level tasks of the Hungarian Defence Forces’ military activity. The General Staff manages the HDF, which ensure the independence of Hungary, as well as the protection of its territory, borders, airspace, and cyberspace; carry out joint defence and peacekeeping tasks deriving from international agreements; and are engaged in humanitarian activities, in harmony with the rules of international law.

CIVIL CONTROL, INTERACTIVE COOPERATION

General, the Committee on Defence and Law Enforcement of the National Assembly supported your appointment to Chief of Defence with one abstention and eight votes in favour in its session on 2 May 2023. What was the reason for the unanimous trust of the MPs?

- ▶ The ministerial nomination, which was a great honour; the support by the government; and hopefully my preparedness in military, vocational, and leadership skills. Before my position in Brussels, I was the second-in-command of the HDF and in foreign missions, I worked as a military representative of Hungary to the NATO and EU Military Committees. My appointment is the peak of military career as the chiefs of defence can serve their country in the highest rank, as four-star generals. At the hearing before the Committee on Defence and Law Enforcement, I talked about us living in a deteriorating security environment, the most important security challenges and risks, how the HDF should be organized in light of these, what the most important tasks and junctures are, and how I see the future of the HDF. The members of the Committee were greatly interested in the Russo-Ukrainian War and the related activities of NATO and the EU. In this regard, I was in a privileged situation as during my work as a military representative in Brussels, I learned much about the Euro-Atlantic international organizations and gained personal experience in decision-making procedures and international political and military preparatory work for decisions. As there is a conventional war going on close to the borders of NATO's Eastern Flank, we carried out real-world tasks with the Alliance. It was edifying to see the creation of deterrence and defence plans in the Euro-Atlantic region, the importance of professional representation of the national positions, and how the Alliance's decisions should be "translated" to guarantee Hungary's security and defence.

What are the significant focal points of the cooperation between the Committee on Defence and Law Enforcement of the National Assembly and the Hungarian Defence Forces?

- ▶ This is not really a cooperation between the Committee on Defence and Law Enforcement and the Ministry of Defence/Hungarian Defence Forces as the Committee exerts civilian control over the armed forces on behalf of the National Assembly. I find this controlling function especially important; we have a reporting obligation to the Committee but we can also initiate a consultation. From this aspect, we can also talk about cooperation because the opinions and experiences of MPs regarding the discussed topics – such as development concepts, procurements, the state of the armed forces, etc. – are really important; not only because of the political approval and support but also to improve the quality of proposals. Therefore, we, military leaders, highly appreciate the constant assistance provided by the Committee as an elected political body that observes and assesses the HDF from the outside and gives political advice regarding their functioning and the directions of their further development. These civilian experiences and the interactive cooperation are beneficial to us, so we provide many possibilities and forums – in the form of exercises, military technology demonstrations, unit visits, etc. – for the Committee to help them form a thorough opinion.

THE ROLE OF MILITARY FORCE HAS GAINED IN VALUE

General, you used the expression “change of pace” in connection with the necessary development of the Hungarian Defence Forces several times, during which the armed forces received a noticeably new image, paired with a different attitude. Besides praising these changes, you also criticised them several times. What accounts for and can explain your sense of mission, strong commitment to, and conviction about the future modernisation of the Hungarian Defence Forces and the security of Hungary?

- ▶ We live in such a historical situation that there has been a war going on in our neighbouring country for more than two years. Nonetheless, we are no longer used to it in Europe since the end of the Balkan Wars. In the Cold War, the two existing political, economic, and military blocs were not only opponents but also kept one another at bay due to the balance of power. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the great powers and the international organizations were able to deal with conflicts, and a peaceful development began. This gave a sense that wars had irrevocably disappeared from Europe. Here I have to recall the first, 2003 European Security Strategy, the first sentences of which say “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free. The violence of the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history”. After two decades, we can already see that history has refuted this idea. Due to the Russo-Ukrainian War, the security situation in Europe deteriorated, moreover, I could say that the security of the whole world did not improve, either. The Russo-Ukrainian War is going on and the Israel-Hamas War keeps the Middle East, as well as the Western and Islamic worlds anxious. The number of smaller armed conflicts and clashes is increasing, and the countries of the world are spending more on their militaries (USD 2243 billion in 2023) than on the fight against climate change or projects serving sustainable development. Meanwhile, the role of military force has been revalued in this world lacking security.

For me, these events and processes give strength and commitment to developing the Hungarian Defence Forces, so that they can be ready to fight in a possible armed conflict – alone or together with the allies – if needed, to protect the Hungarian national interests and safeguard the security of the people. Therefore, armed forces development has a real stake today: available resources must be spent in a way to reach development and modernization goals. Today there is a strong political will to create combat-ready armed forces in Hungary and we, soldiers are striving to carry out this political task. The government does not only define goals but also allocates significant budgetary resources – this year, HUF 1309 billion – to the modernization of the HDF. We already met the NATO requirements in this field last year, as our defence budget attained the 2% GDP guideline established by the Alliance. In the past 30–40 years, either of the two – political and financial – requirements for armed forces modernization was always lacking, but there were times when neither was available. However, now there are both political goals and budgetary support. We are part of a historic possibility as we do not only live to see the role of military force gaining in value but we can also be part of the creation of the combat-ready and modern armed forces in Hungary.

What significant changes and developments were introduced in the past year, since you were appointed Chief of Defence?

► Following my appointment, I laid particular emphasis on training, so that the preparation of our soldiers reaches the highest possible level. Without well-trained and motivated soldiers there are no modern, up-to-date armed forces. The peak of the training was the international and national Exercise Adaptive Hussars 23 in November 2023, in which not only the soldiers of the HDF and the NATO member states participated but we also involved the civilian public administration, which was unprecedented in the past 30 years. Thus, we tested not only the HDF but also the whole national defence system of Hungary. At the exercise, the cooperation between the armed forces and the defence public administration covered several fields: we used civilian economic resources and services, airports and facilities, and made reservists enlist. All these were already carried out under the new defence legislation. It is important to emphasize that defending the country is not the exclusive task of the armed forces, the national strength is much more than this. It includes the economic opportunities of the country, the national defence public administration system, the law enforcement and national security bodies, and even the Hungarian citizens. Defending the country is everybody's duty! As Lajos Kossuth said in December 1848, "All up for the defence of the country!"

Another great task was to find new personnel for the armed forces, probably the most well-known example of which was the "Man to the hardware!" recruitment campaign. The infantry battalion of the HDF 30th Mechanized Infantry Brigade in Hódmezővásárhely, which is equipped with armoured Lynx infantry fighting vehicles, was brought to full strength with the help of such a countrywide advertisement, as well as the 1st Self-propelled Artillery Battalion of the HDF 1st Armoured Brigade, the artillerymen of which are preparing for performing tasks with PzH 2000 tracked, self-propelled howitzers. We could try to recruit as we had done before, recruiting in each part of the country at the same time, with the same salary and working conditions, but it did not work. We must know that all armed forces in Europe are striving to increase their manpower, and so are the Hungarian Defence Forces. Our related indicators are constantly improving, which is just as important as procuring combat equipment. However, we can create combat-ready armed forces only by carrying out multiple tasks at a time, which include writing field manuals and doctrines, forming an up-to-date organizational structure, training, modern leadership, and creating appropriate financial, technical, and infrastructural conditions. All this must be done in a way that conforms to the requirements of interoperability, the cooperation with the allies.

The chiefs of defence of several Western states expressed their appreciation for the coordinated military exercise and they shared the opinion that there has not been an exercise in their countries with such close cooperation, involving the public administration.

► If we think about it, without the Russo-Ukrainian War, it would have been unimaginable in Hungary, too, because everybody likes to live in peace; and if war, armed forces, or arms enter the civilian sphere, where people live their everyday lives, that triggers – if not fear – a certain reticence in each case. What can we think of? For example, if soldiers are located in student hostels or schools currently out of order, combat vehicles are refuelled at gas stations, or a bakery receives an order to bake bread immediately for five thousand people and give it to the HDF, these are novelties in the civilian sphere as simi-

lar situations could not have been encountered before. During Exercise Adaptive Hussars 23, it was relatively easy as the major phases took place in the three counties of North-eastern Hungary, where people are geographically the closest to the Russo-Ukrainian War. They directly feel the effects of the war going on in their neighbourhood and know that this crisis can escalate anytime, which would affect Hungary as well. Therefore, people living there accept the exercise and understand its necessity. The public bodies, NGOs, and citizens in Zala County were also understanding because the region has a long-standing military history. Organizing such cooperation is more difficult in Western Europe because there, people live further away from the armed conflict and do not feel the direct threat. It is true that they also meet refugees from Ukraine and hear about the European Union supporting the country's defensive fight and buying ammunition for the Ukrainian armed forces but the direct threat does not become part of their everyday lives to such an extent as here, in Hungary. Processing and analysing the lessons learned during the exercise is currently in progress, and we are going to initiate legislative changes based on them to enhance the cooperation between the military and civilian bodies and delegate supply and service tasks to the allied forces more robustly. We saw what worked well and what was problematic. I think more should be done for the use of economic services, calling in reservists, and better meeting the demands of the civilian public administration and the HDF.

What are the fields where the legislative changes that you mentioned became necessary?

► We are examining numerous issues the solution of which would strengthen national defence and the more effective implementation of which would multiply the power of the HDF. One of these issues is calling in reservists with priority, which requires the soldier's intention to enlist and also the employer's support. Although there is a compensation mechanism for both parties – the soldier and the employer –, a more encouraging system is needed. Or, there are cases when the HDF need civilian – shipping, logistical, or transportation – services but the fulfilment is delayed due to bureaucratic difficulties. We made proposals for a simplified decision-making procedure, accounting methods, and changes facilitating task solving. Based on the lessons learned in the war, we would also like to simulate unusual civilian tasks in the future that do not occur in peacetime, such as shutting down critical infrastructural elements that cover a large area for a longer time, civil defence provision for internally displaced people, and providing help in case of mass casualty incidents. Possible supplementary regulations needed during a state of war must be considered so that the country can operate or conduct secure combat activities in domestic territories, e.g., in the fields of cooperation among public administration bodies and NATO commands or the treatment of prisoners of war. For example, I find it essential to revise the rules of military justice in light of the new special legal order. I trust that due to the state of emergency operation, the review and amendment of legislation will take a shorter time than usual. However, we also know that despite this, the legislative process is long and can only be the result of mature legal solutions.

General, you are a soldier, a chief of defence, and a lawyer in one person. How are legal activities and aspects present in the Hungarian Defence Forces?

► I would like to strengthen this field by all means, but the Ministry of Defence is in charge of its regulation. The General Staff has a legal and administrative directorate and there

are also military lawyers serving with the units, who help the leadership work of the commanders, guarantee the legitimate functioning of organizations and the legitimacy of commanders' legal practices – such as disciplinary and damage settlement cases, etc. However, I would like to enhance the education of the law of war at the university faculties of public governance and law. I find it important to form a more dynamic military lawyer mindset, without which the defence administration system cannot develop fast enough to meet the government's intentions, nor can it improve the efficiency of civilian and military crisis management. What I would really like to change is the teaching of the law of war, not only at the Ludovika University of Public Service but also at other universities. Without this, strengthening the military lawyer mindset and gaining a wider knowledge of the international law of war is unimaginable. For instance, in the university courses, we scarcely deal with the Geneva and Hague Conventions, the law of war, and the prisoner of war status – the legal training only touches upon these important subjects. However, as we saw in the war crimes in Srebrenica during the Yugoslav Wars in July 1995 or the Bucha massacre in the Russo-Ukrainian War in March 2022, these tragic events can unfortunately become part of everyday life. Lawyers, criminal lawyers, and humanitarian lawyers have to be prepared to prevent and handle such sad and unacceptable events. We have begun to discuss with the law faculties of universities, the Hungarian Red Cross, and humanitarian NGOs how we could change this field of education. Besides, we have contacted several international legal institutions because there are outstanding military law courses in Greece and Switzerland, for instance.

THE MILITARY CAREER IS OPEN TO EVERYONE

Military career might be appealing to women due to the legal work involved. What are the expectations from female soldiers in the Hungarian Defence Forces?

► There is a complete equality of rights for female soldiers in the Hungarian Defence Forces because they have the same rights and responsibilities as males, the requirements, allowances, and supplies are also the same in case of equal rank and position. As for the same requirements, there cannot be a difference in qualification, preparedness, physical performance, or military virtues. The career path is open to servicewomen just as it is to their male counterparts. We have female generals, dozens of colonels, numerous senior officers, and women are present in each category of personnel. Women can also serve in combat positions; it is only performance that matters. We have female tank platoon commanders, fighter pilots, and transport aircraft pilots. It is true that the ratio of women is primarily high in the fields of logistics, health care, CIS, law, finance, and personnel policy but combat support and service support branches – where servicewomen also serve – are also part of the operation and warfare. Therefore, there is no discrimination, which I personally consider particularly important. I am really glad and proud that we can provide military careers to men and women without discrimination in both domestic and foreign service.

As for the Swiss military model, what kind of experiences and patterns can be integrated into the Hungarian Defence Forces?

- ▶ The Swiss military model in practice means that each Swiss citizen is obliged to do military service. Until the age of 32, every Swiss soldier is also a reservist and keeps their uniform, full equipment, and personal weapon at home but there were times when they also kept ammunition there. The armed forces are relatively small – with 3,100 professional soldiers and 18,000 conscripts – but they maintain an outstandingly powerful, reserve system – with 120,000 reservists, who can be mobilised immediately. Each citizen is prepared and trained strictly, reservists are called up and mobilised constantly, and serving the homeland is a recognised activity. The model is based on the neutral status of Switzerland, recognised by international law, and its positive historical experiences. Switzerland is one of Europe’s most militaristic countries, which – similarly to Israel in the Middle East – can mobilise 200,000 soldiers in a short time.

Their approach is also characterised by the fact that the current Chief of Defence of Switzerland has previously been the number one leader of a bank in Singapore and he was selected and called home to take his current position with this background. There is high interoperability between the military and civilian spheres: one day, one is a factory manager, and on the next one, a regimental commander. They serve their time as soldiers and then return to the civilian sphere. The employer compensation created in Switzerland and the employee’s obligation give the system solid stability when it comes to national defence or service in the armed forces. Each male citizen is involved in military service, regardless of vocation and social status. Most of them train themselves regularly, they attend rifle associations and clubs. Although the military threat to Switzerland is not too high, they can maintain the commitment to defending the country in this peaceful environment. I am convinced that Switzerland can be an example not only to Hungary but also to any NATO member or European state. The cooperation between the Hungarian Defence Forces and the Swiss armed forces is great. Next to former KFOR Commander Lieutenant General Ferenc Kajári, a Swiss military adviser served as a colonel. Hungary often offered (relinquished) responsible military leading (brigadier general) positions to the Swiss armed forces as being small, the Hungarian Defence Forces cannot maintain a constant rotating presence. The two armed forces cooperate in several fields, including peace partnership programs.

General, you have an exceptionally wide international outlook, which is indispensable in the leading position in a modern military. How can the different layers of military personnel be supported in acquiring the widest possible range of international experience?

- ▶ The Hungarian Defence Forces have 245 officer and NCO positions at the NATO and EU military commands and staffs. We regularly fill these positions and taking the four-year foreign missions into account, fifty soldiers take over the service in international positions yearly. We have nearly a thousand servicemembers doing armed foreign service, for example, more than 400 soldiers are participating in the KFOR operation in Kosovo. EUFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been led by a Hungarian commander, Major General Dr. László Sticz since January 2024, and 280 Hungarian soldiers are currently serving there. Our soldiers also serve in Iraq. Previously, we were present in Afghanistan for nearly two decades, until the NATO mission ended in the Asian country.

We have immense foreign experience; we participate in numerous international military exercises each year. Besides, due to the Russo-Ukrainian War, there is also a multi-

national battle group in Hungary with American, Croatian, Italian, and Turkish soldiers serving together with Hungarians. We also have to mention the NATO Headquarters Multinational Division Centre (HQ MND-C), located in Székesfehérvár. The proportion of Hungarian soldiers on the staff is 80 per cent, the rest of the officers and NCOs are from eight NATO member states. Currently, HQ MND-C is led by a Slovakian commander, Major General Tibor Králik. Previously, this position was filled by a Croatian general. There are also other NATO forces serving in Hungary: the Heavy Airlift Wing (HAW) in Pápa, the Regional Special Operations Component Command (R-SOCC) in Szolnok, signal and headquarters elements in Székesfehérvár, and the NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (MILMED COE) in Budapest. Therefore, we have a wide circle of international relations with other armed forces, which requires the personnel's constant professional and (English) language preparation. During joint exercises, we practise cooperation with other NATO forces while carrying out international tasks, without which achieving and maintaining high-level interoperability would be unimaginable.

ADJUSTING TO THE CHANGING SECURITY POLICY SITUATION

What are the new challenges of the recent past deriving from Hungary's NATO membership and what can we expect in the future?

- ▶ There have not been as many changes in NATO in defence planning during the past thirty years as in these last two. The Alliance has prepared so-called regional defence plans, which focus on the defence of the Eastern borders. The defensive shield in each Eastern European country is provided by national armed forces and NATO forces stationed there. The goal is to create a deterrence and defence system with the necessary command, logistical, and support elements so that the Russian party can see that NATO wants to and is able to defend its member states. Nowadays, 90,000 soldiers are participating in Exercise Steadfast Defender 24 in the Eastern Flank, the Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary. With this exercise, NATO is demonstrating considerable force and creating a "shield" that can halt possible Russian offensive intentions. The exercise is also the first test of NATO's new armed forces model, which can deploy 300,000 soldiers within a month for the sake of collective defence, and within six months, it can deploy 500,000 more.

How are the airspace and the airbases protected in Hungary? What kinds of techniques are used?

- ▶ Air surveillance and control and air defence are basic means of a country's sovereignty. Serious developments have been made in this field during the past few years. Hungary has procured state-of-the-art radars and early warning systems that report intruder aircraft or attack missiles heading to the country. Today we have the NASAMS American-Norwegian medium-range air defence missile system, which can carry out multiple tasks. This system can defend the most significant elements of the critical infrastructure, such as the Paks Nuclear Power Plant. We will use this in military operations to provide an air defence umbrella to land forces and support elements. We also plan to procure the Israeli Iron Dome system, which can play an important role in Hungary's air defence

tasks and the maintenance of airspace sovereignty. The Russo-Ukrainian War has made it clear that air defence is one of the most significant capabilities that a certain state and NATO must have.

We also lay particular emphasis on ISR and early warning capabilities that play a major role in modern warfare. It can be seen from the Russo-Ukrainian War that cruise missiles and hypersonic missiles directly attack each vital building, military target, and airbase in Ukraine. Similarly, Ukrainian missiles and long-range drones attack nearby Russian territories as well. These capabilities play an irreplaceable role in prevention and target acquisition, which are indispensable for successful air defence activities. Defending air bases is essential to us, so we practised it during Exercise Adaptive Hussars 23 to repel a simulated attack through dispersal. It took hours to relocate Gripen fleets from Kecskemét to the Pápa Air Base and the Hévíz–Balaton civilian airport in Sármellék.

Currently, our combat air fleet is made up of multipurpose Gripen fighter aircraft, Airbus H145M and H225M helicopters, Russian Mi-24 attack helicopters, and Mi-17 transport helicopters. We recently introduced the new Brazilian KC-390 military transport aircraft in Kecskemét, of which two will serve in the Hungarian Air Force. With this, our air transport capacity (2 Airbus A319s and 2 Dassault Falcon 7Xs) will be further strengthened. We constantly improve our Zrínyi Defence and Military Development Program based on the lessons learned from the war. For example, a decision was made in the recent past about procuring four new Gripen fighter aircraft shortly.

How advanced is the defence potential of the HDF Land Forces?

- In Hungary, there is a permanent controversy among professionals about how many battle tanks, combat vehicles, and artillery pieces the HDF need, and within that, which equipment types should be purchased or manufactured. This can be easily answered only in theory. Conforming to the NATO requirements, a heavy infantry brigade will give the backbone of the HDF Land Forces, which is to be created from the mechanized infantry brigade in Tata. A heavy infantry brigade, according to NATO standards, consists of three to five manoeuvre sub-units, one of which is an armoured battalion. As we have a low number of old Russian-made T-72 battle tanks, our sub-unit should be equipped with state-of-the-art tanks. The political and professional decision is to equip the new heavy infantry brigade with German Leopard 2A7HU main battle tanks. The 2A7 with the Leo nickname is a state-of-the-art tank type, the best in Europe. These tanks are already equipped with active anti-aircraft and anti-drone systems. An artillery battalion is also assigned to the heavy infantry brigade, which is made up of 24 Panzerhaubitze 2000 tracked self-propelled howitzers in our case. Such a howitzer can fire at a given target at six trajectories at the same time, with the shells hitting the target simultaneously. It can be imagined as if six howitzers fired at once. The artillery howitzer is reliable, can be fielded quickly, and can deliver fire rapidly. It is performing well in the Russo-Ukrainian War. The new brigade will also need modern infantry battalions, which will be equipped with German Lynx tracked infantry fighting vehicles. This is how the complete heavy capability of the new military unit is built up. It will not only have state-of-the-art combat equipment but also digital soldier systems, an automated command and control system, and high-performance combat support and service support elements. The German colleagues say that when the armoured unit is fully set up, Hungary's heavy infantry brigade will be among the most modern ones in Europe.

Based on the lessons learned from the war, “drone capabilities” and the extensive use of “deep supporting fire” have become quite significant in warfare. How advanced are the Hungarian armed forces in this field?

- ▶ What we see in the Russo-Ukrainian War is that although they have not changed warfare, drones have a considerable effect on combat activities. Why should we pay special attention to it? According to the previous Russian doctrines, military forces should be massed for deployment in large armoured formations during offensive operations. Today we cannot see this in the Russo-Ukrainian War because, at the company level, formations with more than eight to ten combat vehicles simply could not move on the front without being detected by drones immediately. Now, intelligence, battlefield interdiction, and disruption of the enemy are the main tasks of drones. We must know that Ukraine is planning to manufacture one million drones this year, in 2024. It is obvious that if there are one million drones in the air, nothing can be hidden there. Therefore, intelligence is of outstanding significance from the aspect of movement.

The other important lesson learned from the Russo-Ukrainian War is deep supporting fire. Destroying logistic forces, transport hubs, and command posts further from the frontline can be vital as it disrupts the command and supply of troops in contact with the enemy, their warfighting ability decreases, and they become much more easily destructible. Deep supporting fire means that second-echelon forces, such as logistics and reserves, suffer losses due to which they cannot be used in direct contact with the enemy. The Ministry of Defence and the General Staff are examining how the Zrínyi program could be extended by procuring such weapon systems.

DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL CAPABILITIES AND MILITARY INDUSTRY CAPACITIES

There have earlier been doubts about the medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) capability of the Hungarian Defence Forces. Unfortunately, this special capability was recently required in an incident in Kosovo to evacuate our soldiers. It turned out that the military medical service can act quickly and professionally. What can be known about this very important field?

- ▶ Let’s talk about it honestly. Earlier, many said that transport aircraft do not serve the HDF, but the government. During the unfortunate events in Kosovo in May 2023, Hungarian soldiers also got injured. The MEDEVAC aircraft of the Hungarian Defence Forces arrived there in time to bring home our 27 injured soldiers. We organized the medical care at the site, then in the camp, and finally in Hungary, where the injured soldiers were treated in the Military Hospital. Our physicians and nurses made medical interventions immediately and did a professional job. Again, let me mention the example of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Many think that if soldiers go to war, they fight and die there. But it is not true. A number of soldiers – even 80 per cent of them – get injured, so, healing them and restoring their health is usually more important than battle damage repair capabilities. Therefore, if a soldier gets injured, the most significant task is to provide the necessary medical care and then rehabilitation, because it is not only an important factor in keeping up fighting morale but also the source of personnel replacements as injured soldiers

can return to service in the best-case scenario. The HDF bought a ROLE-2³ field hospital (special technical devices, vehicles, and equipment) in 2022, the main task of which is to provide medical support to a fighting brigade. Recently, the medical personnel were prepared for deployment and operation in field conditions. Our ROLE-2 field hospital performed well at this year's NATO Exercise Vigorous Warrior 24 medical system exercise, where the forces and assets of 33 countries participated in the Várpalota training area. I must add that this capability does not only serve the HDF as it can also be employed in such domestic crises (disasters, floods, etc.) where immediate and mass casualty medical care is needed. Therefore, ROLE-2 field hospitals also have national defence significance.

Major General László Kovács, professor at the Faculty of Military Science and Officer Training of the Ludovika University of Public Service, called attention to the significance of cyber warfare and military cyber security in several of his studies. Zoltán András Nagy, associate professor at the Department of Criminal Law of the Faculty of Law of the University of Pécs and the Department of Criminal Intelligence, Economic and Cybercrime of the Faculty of Law Enforcement of the Ludovika University of Public Service, also wrote about cyber warfare, cybercrime, and cyberterrorism several times. This subject is highly relevant. How advanced are the Hungarian Defence Forces in this field?

- ▶ We also have learned important lessons related to cyber warfare in the Russo-Ukrainian War. Preparation for cyber threats began earlier as in 2007, Russian hackers attacked the state IT system of Estonia. The country's public administration, banking and financial services, pension insurance, and postal systems were blocked for days or even weeks. Following the attacks, Estonia rebuilt its IT defence system, and today the country has one of the most well-developed IT and cyber security systems in Europe. As a result of this, everything can be done electronically in a short time (for example, establishing a company takes 15 minutes), it is possible to elect online, and the internet service is free and well-developed in the country. The Gerasimov Doctrine of 2013 embedded cyber warfare in the toolbox of hybrid warfare, which was intensively applied by the Russians in 2014 and before the war waged in 2022.

Battles in cyberspace and attacks on each other's systems are also constant in the Russo-Ukrainian War. Most people think that a cyber-attack begins with "shooting down" the other's Wi-Fi and mobile networks. This does not happen easily as armed forces protect their internet and mobile services networks, while enemies attack and disrupt each other's systems. Therefore, one might seem that cyber warfare is overshadowed in warfare, which is wrong because it is a part of general armed conflicts, which appears in different forms, including the possibility of triggering targeted attacks. The Hungarian Defence Forces have a powerful cyber security capability and limited cyber-attack capability. We established the HDF Cyber Command at the end of 2022; its Cyber and Information Operations Centre is in Szentendre.

³ As part of the Zrínyi Defence and Military Development Program, there was a tender for the public procurement of a modular and deployable military hospital with surgical capabilities in 2021, which was procured in 2022. With this, an independent ROLE-2 Basic field medical treatment capability was created, with the help of which medical professionals can provide high-level medical care to those in need even in the area of operations. The equipment background is important but capabilities also require people, expertise, and teamwork. See: <https://honvedelem.hu/hirek/nehaz-korulmenyek-kozott-is-bizonyitott-a-role-2-allomanya.html> (Accessed: 14 February 2024).

Related to the border protection of Hungary, the Hungarian Defence Forces had and have tasks. In what direction can the protection of our national borders be developed?

- ▶ Border protection is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior, and is carried out by the nominated police forces and border hunter sub-units. The fence built at the Serbian border has transformed into an advanced technical protection and defence system over the years. Using electronic defence, artificial intelligence, and face recognition systems helped a lot in filtering out recurrent human traffickers and immigrants. The Hungarian intelligent border protection system has already been bought by several countries (such as Kenya), which shows the success of the solutions. The most effective border protection can be achieved if we curb migration and illegal border crossers not at our borders but at the problem's place of origin. In Hungary, great numbers of immigrants and refugees arrive primarily from Afghanistan, Syria, and the Sahel. Pressure can only be reduced if we help stop the triggering causes and the affected countries build powerful border protection along the escape routes. It was clearly visible in the recent past that, for example, when the Serbian internal affairs bodies efficiently closed down the borders, took action against human trafficking, and transported illegal immigrants from the territory, then in the Hungarian villages along the border, citizens felt themselves in security and lived a much calmer period. Therefore, it also shows that problems always have to be solved at their place of origin and not when immigrants arrive.

What is the present of manufacturing military equipment like in Hungary and what kind of future does it have?

- ▶ Here is an important lesson learned from the Russo-Ukrainian War: in case the manufacture and supply chain of military equipment and materials (e.g., ammunition) are blocked, it can cause severe problems for the belligerent parties. It can be sensed that although the Russian military industry shifted to war production in the summer of 2022, it could not substitute for items of military equipment taken out (e.g., main battle tanks) in such numbers as those that had been damaged. Thus, the Russian armed forces lost their capability for military technology regeneration for a time, which could only be restored with resupplies from allied countries. By now, the Russian war industry has ramped up production, but state-of-the-art weapon systems can still be manufactured only with difficulties.

There are even greater problems in Western Europe and the USA as defence industry capacities decreased during the past decades of peace, they were tailored to the natural resupply of armed forces. Further difficulties include the military industry being in private ownership in Western allied countries (as opposed to the Russian state ownership), so accelerating and expanding capacity is only possible with market solutions. Currently, large military industry companies, such as the American Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, General Dynamics, or perhaps the European Rheinmetall, Airbus, Thales, and BAE Systems are expanding their manufacturing capacities but it will take a long time. In Europe, this process is also helped by the EU, which stimulates the European defence industry, military research, developments, and innovation with resources and policy solutions.

So, we are in a period of building up defence industry capacities. This situation is favourable for Hungary because this way, a portion of the capacities is created in Hungary. That is why the Lynx combat vehicle factory in Zalaegerszeg, the ammunition plant in

Várpalota under construction, the Airbus factory near Gyula, and the factory manufacturing small arms in Kiskunfélegyháza were created with state subsidies. Hungary took the first step in time, before the war, thus, large defence industry companies settled in the country and are building up a wide import chain, creating workplaces and constantly training our defence industry engineers and professionals.

TOGETHER WITH SOCIETY

General, you called attention to the significance of society's national defence capabilities several times, which are being developed with great efforts. What results were achieved in this strategic field in the recent past?

► Socialisation of the armed forces is the most fitting expression I can find. After the system of peacetime conscription in Hungary ended in 2004, the social relations of the armed forces weakened. Earlier, in the period of conscription, the army was a “melting pot”, where every young man served, socialised, and actually became an adult. By now, this function of the armed forces has disappeared. However, nostalgic voices are raised from time to time saying that conscription would be needed, especially now that there is a war raging in our neighbouring country. In this situation, the leaders of the Ministry of Defence and the Hungarian Defence Forces are strengthening the social relations of the armed forces by several means. During the past years, we reorganized our recruitment campaigns, beginning with the “To the army!” slogan, to which we later added the short question “Are you ready too?” With the newest “Man to the hardware!” recruitment campaign, we offer specific positions (artilleryman, infantryman, airman, etc.) to young recruits with a good salary and career path. We have just started the volunteer territorial defence reservist recruitment campaign, which aims at creating a 20,000-strong reserve military component. We would like to double the number of reservists, with which we could enhance the image of the army in public circles. I see great potential in this field. If a volunteer territorial defence sub-unit is created in Böhönye, Marcali, Mándok, or any other place in the country, the HDF appear there and local residents can more easily undertake the task of serving the homeland in their spare time because they can see how they directly benefit from it. During the training, the modern “border fortress soldiers” receive a good and experience-focused preparation, which gives them new challenges, human morals, and a sense of belonging to a community. Everyone wins with this: those who enlist as professional soldiers or reservists, but society and the military, too.

Therefore, we are currently working to make the territorial defence system more complete, build it up, and make it more useful so that it reaches even more citizens. We established the necessary experience-focused military frameworks last year: we created the territorial defence forces command and set up a territorial defence regiment in each region.

Let me ask you a personal question. I was a conscript border patrol corporal, could I also have a role in this system, for instance?

► Yes, that would be very good if you also took up territorial defence tasks. Based on your experiences, knowledge, military pre-qualification, familiarity with weapons, and mem-

ories as a border patrol, you would be an outstanding recruiter, who could address young people authentically. Having a military pre-qualification, you could set a good example because you are not afraid of weapons and know about the rules that have to be followed as a soldier. Evidently, you could promote the reservist career better than a general. That is because – if I can say so – you could be a benchmark in your direct environment, who does serious academic work after the military/border patrol service and, thus, can be regarded as a role model. If you tell someone to come join us and become a territorial defence reservist – we represent a noble cause, let's do it together –, you will learn, and you will gain experience; it would probably have such a convincing force that young people would more easily enlist as reservists.

General, earlier you achieved outstanding sports results in judo, too. We think about Colonel Kálmán Furkó with a good heart. He has left a legacy with invaluable significance after himself both in the Hungarian Defence Forces and Hungarian martial arts. Do the Hungarian Defence Forces have a “martial arts” club now? How can the role of sports be strengthened in the everyday life of the HDF?

► Kálmán Furkó is a real role model, who was an iconic figure of the Hungarian Defence Forces. I consider sports important not only for professional soldiers but also for reservists. We began the volunteer national defence judo program two years ago, in the framework of which we addressed judo associations. We provide them with curriculum and support so that the associations can provide self-defence preparation for our territorial defence reservists. I consider it really important because of endurance, attitude, and the spirit of combat. This program is getting more and more successful because the number of participants has been increasing steadily. We will continue to follow this direction and provide professional sports conditions with equipment, gyms, swimming pools, and running tracks. Thus, each soldier can spend one hour a day doing sports, making use of the sporting opportunities available to everyone. This is indeed a vocation that requires physical preparedness. I could say that we are a workplace that supports physical activities as it is each soldier's right and duty to do some sport for one hour per day. Besides, the HDF support the Defence Sports Association, we have created the Sports Company in Szentendre from professional athletes, who after finishing competitions will organize and manage sports at military organizations.

Besides sports, I also find healthy nourishment important, we are in the period of nutrition reforms in the HDF. Unfortunately, our current recipes do not follow modern healthy nourishment, so they need to be changed. Appropriate body structure is known to be made up of 70 per cent nourishment and 30 per cent workout. In the army, a traditional diet is followed. Everyone loves the traditional HDF bean goulash soup and stew with tarhonya pasta but these meals are far from those considered appropriate by nutrition specialists. We recently held a food science conference and based on the suggestions made there, we will alter our recipes and nutrition-related procurements. I know that many do not like brown rice or bulgur and they would rather not change tarhonya or other tasty and familiar food for it. We must also take steps forward in this field because calorie intake, physical activity, and body structure are closely related. In connection with this, we have a body structure program because we would like soldiers to be healthier and more athletic in the future. Class reunions can give positive feedback in this regard,

I was told several times by my colleagues, because some of the former classmates seem to be older than soldiers, who do physical activities regularly, undergo physical tests, and seek healthy nourishment, which is visible.

Strengthening the community of retired soldiers and preserving traditions are also important tasks, what is to be done in this field?

- ▶ Preserving traditions is an important part of the work, on which we lay emphasis and pay special attention to. We try to provide support by every means to those who work in either military or civilian tradition-preserving organizations and undertake a role in fostering military traditions. They do not have to be convinced that the HDF and the defence of the country are of considerable significance to Hungary. The Ministry of Defence is trying to create an umbrella organization where tradition preservers (re-enactors), social organizations, and senior clubs are involved in a system. We do so in the interest of supporting the army more efficiently, making the HDF more popular, creating a complex national defence approach, and conveying messages. We try to give them every support now and in the future so that they can represent the values of the homeland and the HDF more effectively in a social environment.

The Stefánia Palace – Honvéd Cultural Centre is the symbolic building of the Hungarian Defence Forces, which also represents the HDF's traditions. What is its function nowadays and what kind of message is it carrying from the long past?

- ▶ There are cadet programs for young people and cultural and other programs for the professional personnel in the institution, while pensioners can use the building as a club. We try to maintain community life not only in the Stefánia Palace but also in other parts of the country. Earlier there were garrison clubs in the villages and communities with military organizations (Marcali, Kaposvár, etc.), where there was vibrant community life. We are working to revive this because a community space is needed where retired soldiers, cadets, military student hostel students, professional soldiers, and reservists can all have a good time. We have been expanded with the Bálna Defence Centre in Budapest, which provides a new space for exhibitions, launches, conferences, and other events.

General, you are at home in Kaposvár, Pécs, and almost all around Transdanubia. How do you see this part of the country through the eyes of a chief of defence?

- ▶ Baranya and Somogy counties are traditionally important regions for the Hungarian Defence Forces as there have always been military organizations and barracks there. An infantry battalion has been set up recently in Kaposvár for the HDF 1st Armoured Brigade (Tata), as a part of building up the armoured heavy brigade. We have good recruitment results in this region as we have already brought two platoons to full strength; soldiers are arriving dynamically, some of whom live in Pécs. Pécs was a big military garrison once (an infantry regiment, an artillery regiment, and a medical battalion also operated in the town), with still living national defence traditions and serious recruitment potential. I recall that our first reserve company from university students was formed at the University of Pécs, which has been among the university sub-units at full strength since then. The HDF have an outstanding military medical cooperation with the Medical

School of the University of Pécs. We cooperate with the Disaster Management Training Centre of the Department of Operational Medicine, which has one of the most modern simulation centres in Europe. The HDF can also use this centre, moreover, our military instructors are also participating in the training.

General, your work has been recognised with high-level decorations in both Hungary and internationally, including the Knight degree of the French National Order of the Legion of Honour and the Knight's Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit. Which decoration are you the proudest of?

- ▶ I am the proudest of my subordinates evaluating my work honestly. These decorations on my uniform are honourable and important but the appreciation of my comrades and colleagues, their positive feedback and support are the greatest values that a commander can receive from his soldiers. I am fortunate that since my position as brigade commander, I have always had a good relationship with my personnel and I am still constantly striving for that.

General, thank you for the interview!