



**ROMANIA GETS READY
FOR THE 'PRE-WAR' EUROPE**

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K10 Ammunition Resupply Vehicle and K9 Thunder SPH artillery system

The recent news that Romania is about to sign a deal with South Korea for the purchase of weaponry is revealing in at least three ways. The first one is that the agreement, worth about \$1 billion, testifies to Romania's urgency to rearm in the rapidly deteriorating security architecture in Eastern Europe as Russia's war against Ukraine rages on. This is what Donald Tusk, Poland's Prime Minister, recently qualified as a "pre-war" situation in Europe.

His was the clearest statement to date indicating that the security architecture that had been place in the Europe of Yalta and Potsdam has now collapsed. "A new era has begun: the pre-war era," he [said](#). "I'm not exaggerating; it's becoming clearer every day." War, he said, was no longer "a concept from the past" and "any scenario" was now possible.

Nobody can have a keener sense of that than Ukraine's neighbours, including Poland and Romania.

The second takeaway is the specifications of the weapons bought. The [K9](#) Thunder 155 mm self-propelled howitzer, the bulk of the purchase 54 units (three systems of 18), is among the most common and reliable artillery pieces in the world. They have been purchased or produced locally as well by Norway, Estonia, Poland, and Australia.

Needless to say, Romania is beefing up its defences against Russia. "The Russian army has been characterised as an artillery army with a lot of tanks," has [written](#) Sam Cranny-Evans,



Associate Fellow at Royal United Services Institute. Cranny-Evans rightly anticipated, in his article written on February 14th, 2022—ten days before the full-scale invasion—the prominent role artillery would play in the conflict that has been unfolding since. (As a side note, it is no coincidence, either, that the Romanian order from South Korea also includes K2 Panther tanks, more [affordable](#) than the German Leopards and better suited for Romania’s roads than the American M1 Abrams).

Indeed, Romania initially planned on buying wheeled howitzers from Hanwha Aerospace, the South Korean firm that produces them, but changed the order to tracked systems as the war in Ukraine proved their superiority and decisive advantage thanks to all-terrain mobility. According to press reports, representatives of the South Korean company have said that they intend to open an [industrial line](#) in Romania.

And third and last takeaway, the deal is a landmark moment for South Korea in Europe’s defence market. Driven by domestic concerns, South Korea, ever vigilant against North Korea’s militarised and increasingly erratic Communist regime, has seen a mostly unnoticed yet steady growth of its defence industry, in a world where growing diversification is seeing new actors—including notably India—joining vigorously a market that used to be a preserve of the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom.

Indeed, the remote origins of the K9 can be traced back to South Korea’s need to address the North’s superiority in artillery in the early 1980s. With North Korea arming Russia, weapons developed by sister countries—indeed, one nation divided into two states—would be tested in yet another fratricidal war, even though there is very little left to say about Ukraine and Russia being sister nations. That has long been over now. Much is made of Karl Marx’s phrase from his essay on Louis Bonaparte’s Eighteenth Brumaire:

“Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”

It is our fate to witness, tragically, the brutal force of history’s ironies too.