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An attempt at fixing Romanian-Ukrainian relations

On 18 May Ukraine's foreign minister, Kostyantyn Hryshchenko visited Romania. Although this visit – the first in six years by the head of Ukrainian diplomacy – to Bucharest did not bring tangible results, it seems to have revealed a bilateral willingness to improve the very cool relations between the two countries.

During his meetings with President Traian Basescu and the head of Romanian diplomacy, Teodor Baconschi, the Ukrainian foreign minister talked about strengthening economic, transport and energy co-operation. Both parties expressed their willingness to intensify negotiations about the agreement on small border traffic and relaunching the work of the intergovernmental commission monitoring the situation of the Romanian and Ukrainian minorities in both countries. These declarations can be regarded as the resumption of political dialogue about the most delicate issues.

Relations between Romania and Ukraine have been distant for years and high-level contacts have been sporadic. The constant problem in bilateral relations is the question of the location of the Ukrainian minority of 60,000 people in Romania and the population of 150,000 Romanians in Ukraine (Bucharest also adds to this minority the minority of 250,000 Moldovans). Until 2009 both countries were locked in a territorial dispute which was eventually settled in favour of Romania (the trial over the status of Snake Island). Romanian-Ukrainian relations are still being complicated by contentions relating to navigation on the Danube and security issues. Both countries are also divided over the approach to resolving the conflict in Transnistria where Kyiv holds a more conciliatory position on the prospect of maintaining the region's autonomy within the state of Moldova. During his visit Hryshchenko also raised the issue of the plans to install the American anti-missile shield in Romania and hinted that Ukraine would demand consultations in this matter with Romania and the US. Due to a vast array of divergences, it is difficult to expect immediate effects in the process of reviving Ukrainian-Romanian relations. <dab>