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Romania becomes part of the missile defence system

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The operation of the SM-3 missile launcher base was officially inaugurated on 12 May in Deveselu, Romania. This is part of the NATO, and in fact US, ballistic missile defence system. This system is intended to protect European NATO member states from short- and medium-range missiles from the Middle East. The system includes a radar in Turkey (in operation since 2011), a command centre in Germany, Aegis system launchers on US ships along the Spanish coastline and ground launchers in Romania. Another base, analogous to the Romanian one, will be built in Poland as a further element of the system (it is expected to reach operational readiness in 2018).

On 13 May the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, said that the deployment of the US interceptors in Eastern Europe upsets strategic stability, that it has an offensive, anti-Russian character and that it breaches the Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces signed in 1987. He threatened that retaliatory Russian measures will have an adverse effect on the security of the countries where the US launchers have been deployed.

Commentary

- The Deveselu base is the first permanent element of the US's military infrastructure on NATO's eastern flank, and its strategic significance strengthens Romania's role in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. This is another element of the growing military co-operation between Romania and the USA. At present, around one thousand US soldiers are stationed on a rotational basis in the four Romanian bases which have been made available to the USA (the Mihail Kogalniceanu airport is the main point of transfer for soldiers and equipment from Afghanistan). Co-operation covering exercises, foreign missions and intelligence has also been developing for years. The US sees Romania's geostrategic location as its main advantage since it facilitates US military operations in the Middle East, Central Asia and Northern Africa. The Romanian political elite (and public) are to a great extent pro-American, which makes co-operation of this kind easier. They have made consistent efforts over the past two decades to co-operate with Washington, treating the US as the only real guarantor of security.

- Before the Russian annexation of Crimea, the government in Bucharest believed that the Deveselu base would be the greatest guarantor of security to Romania; and this, indirectly, resulted in an absence of substantial investments in the armed forces. Since the balance of powers changed in the Black Sea region, Romania has increased spending

on defence and has accelerated its plans to modernise the Romanian army. At the same time, Bucharest has appealed, for example, for the deployment of NATO's multinational brigade on its territory and for a permanent NATO presence on the Black Sea in a form similar to that of Standing NATO Maritime Groups. Romania is negotiating with Bulgaria and Turkey (Ukraine has also expressed an interest in this) the shape which co-operation between naval forces will take , but it has also made efforts to ensure that the other NATO member states participate in this, too.

- Russia is treating the base already active in Deveselu in the same way as the Redzikowo base in Poland where construction only recently began. This suggests that Russia will focus on counteracting the deployment of the missile interceptors in Poland. It will exploit the US installations to justify its own military deployments that it has already planned or even carried out, and which have already resulted in a significant increase in Russia's military potential in the Black Sea and the Baltic regions.