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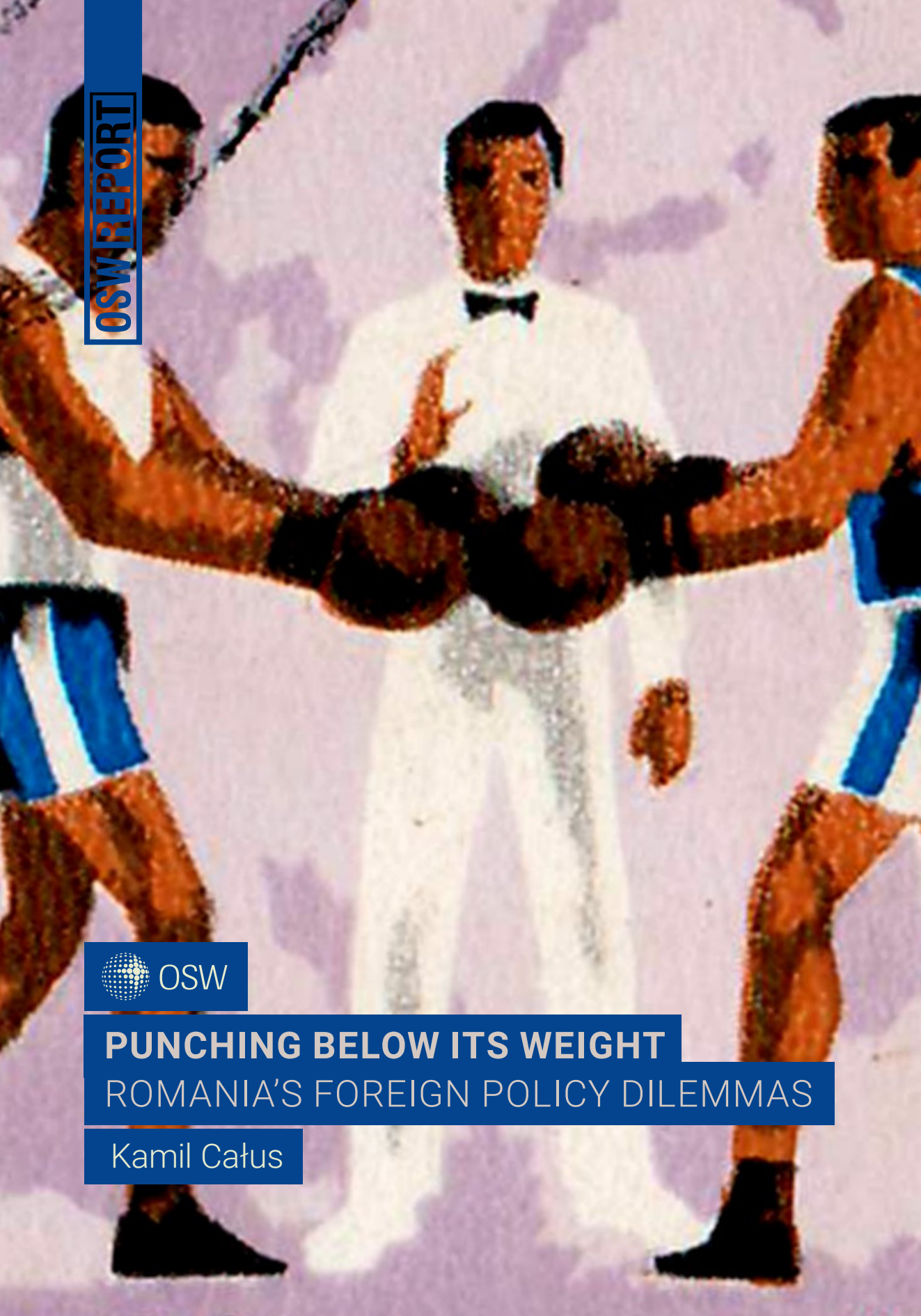

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PUNCHING BELOW ITS WEIGHT

ROMANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY DILEMMAS

Kamil Całus

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WARSAW
SEPTEMBER 2023

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Romanian postage stamp (des. Aurel Popescu) commemorating the 18th European Boxing Championships (Bucharest, 1969)

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ISBN 978-83-67159-81-4

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INTRODUCTION

With an area of some 240,000 square kilometres and a population of just over 19 million, Romania is the largest and most populous country in southeastern Europe and one of Europe's fastest growing economies. Despite the country's potential, Romania's foreign policy appears to be very passive and lacking in any far-reaching ambitions. It is focused on ensuring Romania's security in the narrowest sense of the word: by cooperating as closely as possible with NATO (especially the US), and maintaining good relations with those EU countries (particularly France and Germany) which form the EU's core; the other priority is to continue the process of European integration. Generally, Romania has shown little interest in shaping the situation in its immediate neighbourhood; it has not exhibited any ambition to take on the informal role of a regional leader, and has not initiated (or has been unable to do so effectively) local formats of cooperation that would extend beyond the members of NATO and the EU. The only exception to this rule is Moldova, which Romania sees as an area of special interest and influence for historical, linguistic and cultural reasons.

This report attempts to outline the main determinants and assumptions of Romanian foreign policy and to contribute to the search for answers to the question of why the foreign course of this country, one of the pillars of NATO's eastern flank, is mostly passive and confined to responding to ongoing international developments.

The first chapter outlines Romania's past: from the unification of the Moldavian Hospodarate and Wallachia in the mid-19th century until 1989. This background allows us to understand how the historical experiences of this relatively young country are currently influencing its foreign policy choices. The second chapter analyses the two decades of the transformation period, from the 1989 revolution to the country's accession to NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007. It centres on the difficulties that Romania faced during this period, as well as the motivations and political ambitions of post-Ceaușescu Romania. These topics, as well as the issue of the determinants and long-term objectives of the country's international policy, are explored in much greater detail in the third chapter, which also sketches a kind of mental map of the Romanian people and the way they perceive their place in Europe and the region.

The following sections discuss in detail Romania's relations with the key actors in international politics: the US, NATO, as well as the EU and its most important

member states. The relationship between Romania and China, which in recent years has been increasingly affected by the ongoing rivalry between the United States and China, is also examined. The penultimate chapter focuses on Romania's policy towards the three special neighbours from its perspective: Russia, the perennially feared enemy; Hungary, the traditional regional rival, which pursues a revisionist policy from Romania's point of view; and Moldova, which is considered to be the 'second Romanian state'.

The paper also looks at Romania's relations with Ukraine, a country which it has treated with a great deal of distrust and ignored over the years, but which is now very important in light of the ongoing war with Russia. The report concludes with reflections on Romania's major foreign policy dilemmas, including the consequences of this armed conflict and the issue of Romania's potential reunification with the Republic of Moldova.

MAIN POINTS

- Romania's foreign policy thinking is shaped primarily by a sense of threat from Russia. Since the early 1990s, Romania has consistently been focused in the transatlantic direction, which it considers crucial for ensuring the country's security and enhancing its defence capabilities. It also sees itself as an important actor with the potential to help its Western allies (especially the US) guarantee stability and security in the Black Sea basin.

- Romania's foreign policy is strongly influenced by a sense of geographic, political and cultural alienation from the other countries in the region. Since the 19th century, Romania has considered itself a historical, civilisational and linguistic part of the Romanesque world, a kind of 'Latin island' surrounded by the culturally alien Slavic nations and the Hungarians. This mentality forms an inherent part of the Romanian national idea, which was definitively formulated in the 19th century, and leads the country to naturally gravitate towards the West while placing much less importance on deepening its ties with the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe.

- European integration, one of Romania's priorities, is a key civilisational and developmental tool to aid the country's modernisation while anchoring it firmly within Western structures. Romania's political mainstream seeks closer ties with the EU, which it sees primarily as a forum for forging coalitions to push for solutions that are beneficial to the country. For this reason, as with its relations with the US, Romania tends to succumb to the will of the EU's members, in particular its core states (most notably Germany and France).

- The Romanian political scene is generally marked by a broad consensus on foreign policy objectives. All the most prominent circles recognise the strategic nature of Romania's relations with Washington, and not even the immediate political interests of individual governments have driven them to question the position of the US as the only real guarantor of the country's security. Only the national-conservative Alliance for the Union of Romanians has deviated from the mainstream to some extent. This party has unequivocally called for Romania to take a more assertive stance towards the EU (but not to leave the community), while still supporting the country's close alliance with the US and its presence in NATO.

- The emerging tensions in the Euro-Atlantic community are of serious concern to Romania, which has traditionally regarded cooperation with the EU and the United States as the pillars of its foreign policy in almost equal measure. Its governments have sought to avoid having to choose between Washington and Brussels; in crisis situations, they have called for unity and dialogue. However, when it becomes necessary to take sides, Romanian governments put US relations and security guarantees first.

- Given Romania's size and potential, its political ambitions in the international arena can be regarded as limited. Over the past three decades, this country, the largest and most populous in Southeastern Europe, has failed to develop any effective formats for regional or subregional cooperation to offer its neighbours. Its passivity in this regard stems from the aforementioned strong orientation towards the most powerful Western countries, as well as the lack of historical experience of local leadership.

- The primary objectives of Romania's policy towards Moldova include its modernisation, democratisation and its anchoring in the system of Western institutions and international ties. Romanian governments have been willing to unconditionally support pro-European forces in Chișinău and to actively work to curb the influence of groups they perceive as pro-Russian. At the same time, Moldova is the main area of Romania's rivalry with Russia. Support for the 're-Romanisation' processes in Moldova forms part of Romania's efforts to develop its soft power, but its activities in this field have produced mixed results. On the one hand, Romania's support for Moldova's European integration and its role as Chișinău's 'advocate' in the EU and other international organisations have facilitated and accelerated the process of consolidating Moldova's position in Western structures. On the other hand, Romania's past support for discredited but nominally pro-Western Moldovan politicians, such as the oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc, helped these individuals hold on to power, and have indirectly contributed to the stalling of the country's crucial systemic reforms and modernisation processes.

- Ukraine, despite being Romania's largest neighbour, has never played an important role in its policy. For the past three decades the governments in Bucharest have viewed this country primarily through the prism of problems, such as those involving the Romanian minority, as well as economic and infrastructural disputes. Before the outbreak of the war in 2014, Romania viewed its neighbour as being closely tied to Russia, and which even represented its interests in the region. Bilateral relations intensified

markedly following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Donbas in 2014, and the Romanian government adopted an unequivocally pro-Ukrainian stance after Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022. Nevertheless, Romania remains distrustful of Ukraine, and old stereotypes and unresolved issues still weigh on their bilateral relations.

- Romania's attitude towards Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be described as extremely cautious. The government's strong political support for Ukraine stands in contrast to the small amount of military aid it has officially provided, which was estimated at just €3 million in the first nine months of the war. This falls far short of the sums that other regional countries have contributed, apart from Hungary. Romania has consistently argued that its real aid to Ukraine is much higher and does not differ much from that provided by other Central and Eastern European countries, but it has not made this information public for security reasons. Indeed, it appears that the Romanian government has been careful to avoid situations which Russia could interpret as a sign of the country's direct involvement in the ongoing conflict. For example, it has repeatedly refused to make any comments on the possible supplies of Romanian arms to Ukraine. Its restraint on this issue probably stems from its reluctance to support Ukraine at the cost of reducing its own (limited) military potential, as well as from the traditionally distrustful attitude towards this country on the part of both Romania's government and population.

- The government in Bucharest is concerned that a possible success for the Russian offensive in Ukraine (which was considered likely in the initial phase of the war) could lead to a profound change in Romania's strategic landscape. In the worst-case scenario, Russian troops would arrive on the Romanian border; just as importantly, Moldova's sovereignty would come under threat. Therefore, in the context of the ongoing war, the Romanian government has consistently regarded NATO as the key guarantor of the country's security, and has sought to strengthen the Alliance's military presence on its territory and in the Black Sea. As mentioned, Russian success could jeopardise the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. Despite being aware of this, the government in Bucharest has not taken any significant steps to discourage the Kremlin from possible military action against Moldova or to boost its defence capabilities. On the contrary, Romania has openly admitted on several occasions that in the event of aggression against its neighbour (which the Romanian government considers unlikely), it will not be able to come to its aid due to its own commitments as a member

of NATO. However, it has been trying to make up for its passivity in bolstering Moldova's security by providing it with extensive political, material and financial support.

- Romanian-Russian relations over the past three decades should be assessed as generally cool and tense, and occasionally even openly hostile, as has been the case since 24 February 2022. This state of affairs partly stems from their difficult past and the two nations' outstanding historical issues, such as Romania's demands that Russia return its national treasure, which was seized by the Soviet Union. Another factor is Romania's clearly pro-Western orientation and its political interests in the Republic of Moldova and the Black Sea, which are completely opposed to those of Russia. The Romanian political elite shares a near-unanimous perception of Russia as a key threat to the country's security and its influence in the Black Sea region.

I. ROMANIA'S INTERNATIONAL DILEMMAS BEFORE 1989

Independent Romania appeared on the map of Europe in the mid-19th century as a result of the merger of the so-called Danubian Principalities (Wallachia and the Moldavian Hospodarate).[1] It was born mainly out of the struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire, which had exercised feudal sovereignty over both principalities from the 16th century and traditionally decided who ruled over them. The situation began to change in the 19th century with the gradual waning of Istanbul's power and the birth of Romanian nationalism. In 1859, Alexandru Ioan Cuza was elected *domnitor* (prince) of Moldavia and then Wallachia. In this way, with the Sultan's consent, the two principalities were joined in a personal union; a real union followed three years later. However, the new political entity, the United Romanian Principalities, remained under Turkish sovereignty.

Cuza was deposed in 1866, mainly because of resistance from the local elite who were critical of his modernisation reforms, including the enfranchisement of the peasants. The German Prince Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen succeeded him on the throne. Barely two months later, this young ambitious ruler pushed through the adoption of the first Romanian constitution, which ignored Turkish sovereignty over the United Principalities and established the succession of the throne in the line of Karl's male descendants. Formal independence from the hegemonic power did not come until 11 years later, when the nascent Romania sided with Russia in its conflict with Turkey: this allowed Tsarist troops to pass through its territory and even participate directly in the fighting. On 10 May 1877, the parliament in Bucharest proclaimed the independence of the United Principalities, which was confirmed a year later in the Berlin Treaty that ended the Russo-Turkish War. As a result, the Kingdom of Romania was established in 1881, and the incumbent prince became King Carol I following his coronation.

After the country gained formal independence, the Romanian political elite, which had largely been educated in the West (primarily in France and to a lesser extent in Germany)[2] and was mentally oriented towards the Romance-speaking countries that were culturally and linguistically close to Romania, began to see Russia as a key threat. Although the Tsarist Empire had directly

[1] Not to be confused with the Republic of Moldova which has existed as an independent state since 1991.

[2] C. Dogaru, 'The Romanian Youth's Contact with the West in the 19th Century: Education, Connections and Political Formation', *European Scientific Journal*, February 2018, p. 150, eujournal.org.

contributed to the kingdom's independence from the Ottoman Empire, its consistent pursuit of expansion in the Balkan Peninsula was a matter of growing concern for the Romanian governments in the following decades. They were aware that the young country was standing in the way of Russia's strategic goal of taking control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. As Take Ionescu, prime minister and foreign minister of Romania in the 1920s, wrote in 1891: "If we continue to exist, Russia will fail to realise its plans, which have stirred the hearts of Russians for two centuries. If the neighbouring empire succeeds and realises the dream it has been pursuing with such persistence and perseverance [that is, taking control over these straits – author's note], the Romanian state and nation will become nothing more than a memory".[3] Romania's territorial claims also influenced this perception of Russia. In 1812, the Russian Empire annexed the so-called Bessarabia,[4] the eastern part of the Moldavian Hospodarate inhabited by ethnic Romanians, which Romania wanted to recover.

The situation on the western and northern borders was also complicated. In particular, Romania had claims to Transylvania and Bukovina, which were under Austro-Hungarian rule. As a result, the kingdom's elites, who sought to consolidate the ethnic Romanian lands but lacked a strong position and tools of influence in the region, had to balance between the major European powers and exploit emerging tensions in international relations to achieve their goals. In 1913, following the Second Balkan War, Romania incorporated the Bulgarian-owned area of Southern Dobruja into its territory. However, this strategy yielded much greater success soon after, during World War I. Romania, which had remained neutral for the first two years of the conflict, finally sided with the Entente in 1916 after coming under pressure from France and securing the right to claim Transylvania. The Romanian army's rapid offensive against Austria-Hungary in September of that year resulted in the temporary occupation of most of this region, but a counter-offensive by Austro-Hungarian and German forces drove Romanian troops out of Transylvania. At the same time, Romania suffered a devastating defeat in Dobruja and lost control over the port of Constanța; on 6 December 1916 the German forces entered Bucharest. Even though Romania lost on the battlefield and signed the Treaty of Bucharest on 7 May 1918, the eventual defeat of the Central Powers and the break-up of Austria-Hungary allowed it to annex Transylvania, including most of Banat,

[3] T. Ionescu, *Politica externă a României*, București 1891, pp. 18–19.
[4] This followed the Treaty of Bucharest which ended the Russo-Turkish War (1806–12).

Crişana and Maramureş, as well as Bukovina.[5] At the same time, the outbreak of revolution in Russia made it possible for Romania to recover Bessarabia. However, the new territorial gains made Romania's relations with Hungary and Russia deeply antagonistic.

As a result of World War I Romania achieved its main foreign policy objectives, and over the following years it was able to focus on strengthening its own position, consolidating the state internally and securing its new borders. A new system of alliances became the key instrument for implementing these goals. In addition to the traditional support from France, Romania also secured the support of most of the strongest countries in the region. In 1920, together with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, it formed the Little Entente to protect the three countries against Hungarian revisionism and a possible return of the Habsburgs to the throne in Austria or Hungary. A year later, in March 1921 (*de facto* after the end of the Polish-Bolshevik war, in which Romania remained neutral but sympathetic towards Poland), Romania and Poland signed a treaty that committed the parties to assist each other in the event of a Soviet attack on either of them. Finally, in 1934 Romania, Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia signed the so-called Balkan Pact, also known as the Balkan Entente, with the aim of ensuring their mutual security and the invariability of the borders in the region.[6]

During this period, due to Hungary's weakness and Turkey's diminished importance in the wake of World War I, the Soviet Union was virtually the only real threat to Romania: it made territorial claims to Bessarabia and actively incited the region's population against Romanian sovereignty. Another constant point of contention was the issue of the Romanian national treasure (around 120 tonnes of gold, as well as numerous works of art, the crown jewels of the local princes and the archives of the Romanian Academy), which had been removed to Russia during World War I (in view of the risk that the Central Powers would seize all of the country's territory) and then confiscated by the Soviets.[7]

5 According to the last available census from before the annexation of Transylvania to Romania, which was conducted in 1910, Romanians made up 54% of the region's population while Hungarians accounted for 31.6%.

6 The treaty was aimed against Bulgaria, which wanted to challenge the outcome of the Second Balkan War and World War I.

7 Eventually, some – but not all – of the artworks and archives were returned in the 1950s.

When World War II broke out, Romania's main challenge was to maintain control over the territories it had previously acquired. In this conflict, too, the Romanian government was initially neutral but sympathetic to the Allies (Warsaw decided to release Romania from its allied commitments, even though Soviet troops had entered Polish territory on 17 September 1939). However, the increasingly powerful Iron Guard, a fascist and anti-Semitic political movement founded by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu that was transformed into a party in 1927, put increasing pressure on Carol II to side with Germany. In fact, it became virtually impossible for Romania to remain impartial, following the defeat of the Allies, the withdrawal of British forces from the continent and the capitulation of France in July 1940.

Now without any allies, Romania decided not to mount military resistance on 28 June 1940, and consequently lost Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Just over two months later, on 30 August, it was forced to cede northern Transylvania to Hungary under the Second Vienna Award following pressure from Germany and Italy; then, on 7 September it ceded southern Dobruja to Bulgaria under the terms of the Treaty of Craiova. These events weakened the position of Carol II, and eventually led to his dethronement and the seizure of power by General Ion Antonescu and the Iron Guard. On 23 November 1940, Romania officially became an ally of the Axis powers. This decision had its roots not only in the pro-Nazi sympathies among the Iron Guard's members, but above all from Antonescu's conviction that the Third Reich would inevitably achieve victory in the ongoing war. The alliance with Nazi Germany also offered hope that Romania could regain Bessarabia & northern Bukovina and expand its territory further eastwards at the expense of the Soviet Union. For these reasons, Romania participated in the German attack on the Soviet Union that began on 22 June 1941, which allowed it to reclaim the lost territories and even conquer Transnistria, the lands between the Dniester and the Southern Bug rivers, where a Romanian occupation authority was established with Odesa as its capital.[8]

However this success proved to be short-lived, as the Red Army recaptured Bessarabia in August 1944. In an effort to avoid total defeat and the destruction of the country, King Michael I staged a coup to remove Antonescu from power, and Romania officially joined the Allies. On 23 August 1944, it declared war on

[8] It should be emphasised that the Antonescu government committed mass murders in Transnistria, as well as in Bessarabia and Bukovina, primarily of the Jewish and Roma populations. It is estimated that the regime was responsible for the deaths of some 300,000–400,000 people between 1941 and 1944.

Germany; as early as 31 August, Soviet troops entered Bucharest. It was only on 12 September 1944 that the Soviet Union, Britain and the US and Romania signed an official armistice, which declared the latter to be a defeated state and obliged it to conduct further military operations against Germany under the Soviet High Command.[9] By that time, the Red Army had managed to occupy virtually all of Romanian territory while treating Romanian troops as hostile forces. It is estimated that it disarmed more than 6000 Romanian officers, the same number of non-commissioned officers and around 150,000 soldiers during this period. The vast majority were sent to camps in the Soviet Union.[10]

After the war, Romania found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence; just as in the other countries of the Eastern Bloc, the Moscow-dependent communists took power in the country. In March 1945, the Kremlin (through the deputy head of Soviet diplomacy Andrey Vyshinsky) ordered Michael I to appoint Petru Groza, the leader of the Ploughmen's Front,[11] as prime minister and members of the Romanian Communist Party as the heads of key ministries, notably interior and justice. The Communists strengthened their position thanks to the reincorporation of Transylvania into Romania at Stalin's request, which occurred immediately after the formation of Groza's pro-Moscow government. In 1946, the National Democratic Front he led won almost 70% of the vote in the rigged parliamentary elections. In 1947, the monarchy was officially abolished, and the king was forced to abdicate and leave the country.

Despite the change of political system and the resulting subordination to the Soviet Union, from the early 1950s Romania gradually gained more and more independence from the Kremlin, which was most clearly demonstrated by the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1958.[12] After Nicolae Ceaușescu took power in 1965, Romania increasingly took decisions that openly contradicted Soviet

9 Agreement Between the Governments of United States of America, the United Kingdom, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on the One Hand, and the Government of Rumania, on the Other Hand, Concerning an Armistice, Moscow, 12 September 1944, per: avalon.law.yale.edu.

10 I. Budușan, '74 de ani de la Actul de la 23 august 1944', România Liberă, 23 August 2018, romanialibera.ro.

11 The Ploughmen's Front was in fact a branch of the Romanian Communist Party.

12 The unprecedented decision to withdraw forces from a satellite country appears to have been taken for political and military reasons. It is likely that the Soviet government mainly intended to use it as a bargaining chip in its negotiations with the US aimed at reducing US military presence in Western Europe. In fact, this decision was of little military significance, especially after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Austria which were supplied through the Romanian-Hungarian corridor, as Soviet troops were still stationed in Hungary and directly on the border with Romania, in the Moldavian and Ukrainian Soviet republics. It is impossible to give an unequivocal answer to the question why the Soviet troops withdrew from Romania, as Russian archives concerning this event remain inaccessible. More in S. Verona, 'Historical Note: Explaining the 1958 Soviet Troop Withdrawal from Romania', *SAIS Review*, vol. 10, no. 2, summer-fall 1990, pp. 231–246.

policy, which led to growing tensions in relations with its eastern neighbour. The Romanian dictator not only refused to contribute his troops to the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, but even openly criticised it. Moreover, he declared at the time that the Romanian Armed Forces would generally not be subordinated to the Warsaw Pact's command.[13] It is worth mentioning here that in the same year China told Romania that it would provide assistance, including arms supplies, if it came under attack from any of the Pact's member states.[14] When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1980, Romania was the only country in the Eastern Bloc that did not oppose a UN resolution calling on the Kremlin to immediately withdraw its troops from the country, opting to abstain. Four years later, Romania ignored the boycott of the Los Angeles Olympic Games by the Communist countries.

Romania also grew increasingly critical of the Soviet Union's annexation of Bessarabia, its pre-World War II territory, on which Moscow established the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) in 1940. The Romanian media used a specially upgraded transmitter that covered a large part of the MSSR's territory to broadcast programmes which emphasised the common historical and cultural ties between the inhabitants of the right and left banks of the Prut (the government in Bucharest regarded the ethnic Moldovans who lived in the MSSR as Romanians). At the same time, the issue of the illegal annexation of Bessarabia and Romania's rights to that territory began to be raised at the political level. During a party congress in 1965, Ceaușescu invoked a letter that Friedrich Engels wrote in 1888, in which he criticised Bessarabia's occupation by the Russian Empire in 1812. At another party summit a year later, the dictator also publicly denounced the Romanian Communist Party's support for the annexation, which had been announced back in the 1920s. Finally, in the 1970s, state-approved academic publications not only began to mention the event officially, but even explicitly called it an 'act of Soviet imperialism' or 'Soviet occupation'. Moreover, such works began to openly emphasise the Romanian character of the lands beyond the Prut; their history was included in studies on Romanian history. Mircea Mușat and Ion Ardeleanu, authors of *Viața politică* în *România 1918–1921* (*Political Life in Romania 1918–1921*), a book published in Bucharest in 1971, not only used the term 'Soviet occupation' in the context of the seizure of Bessarabia, but also explicitly stated that it had taken place "as a result of the 1939 Soviet-fascist pact".

13 However, Romania remained a member of the alliance.

14 L. Watts, 'The Soviet-Romanian Clash over History, Identity and Dominion', Wilson Center, wilsoncenter.org.

Ceaușescu's policy of distancing himself from Moscow and his related decisions to emphasise Romania's relative independence were welcomed by the US, which was reflected in diplomatic relations between the two countries. Richard Nixon's visit to Bucharest in 1969 was quite a distinction as he became the first US president to visit Eastern Europe after World War II. Numerous high-level US-Romanian meetings took place over the next decade. By 1978, Ceaușescu had travelled to the US four times, while President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had paid visits to the Romanian capital.

II. EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION – MOVING STEADILY THOUGH BELATEDLY

After the overthrow of the Ceaușescu regime in December 1989 and the start of the political transformation, Romania's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures became the official priority of the country's foreign policy. The National Salvation Front (FSN), led mainly by former Communist Party members and headed by Ion Iliescu, took power in the wake of the anti-Ceaușescu revolution; as early as 22 December 1989 it declared in its ten-point programme that it wanted to include Romania in the "process of building a united Europe".[15] The policy of 'returning to Europe' envisaged the rapprochement with and ultimately accession to NATO and the European Economic Community (EEC; since 1993 the EU). The new government saw these steps, as well as closer ties with the US, as a way of strengthening the country's security in the new geopolitical reality.

As early as October 1991, President Iliescu sent a message to NATO's secretary general in which he expressed Romania's willingness to engage in close cooperation with the Alliance. He described it as "the only organisation capable of ensuring, from a political and military point of view, the stability and security of the emerging European democracies". In 1993, during a visit to the NATO Headquarters, Iliescu stated explicitly that his country was interested in integration with the Euro-Atlantic structures. A year later, Romania became the first post-Communist country to join the Partnership for Peace, NATO's post-Cold War programme of cooperation with aspiring countries. In 1994, it submitted an Individual Partnership Programme at the organisation's headquarters, the second Central European country to do so after Poland.[16] It also began to actively participate in joint exercises with the members of the Alliance: Romanian soldiers took part in around 40 drills in the first three years of the country's participation in the programme alone; only Poland could boast a higher number among the region's countries. As Romania pursued this policy of drawing closer to the West, it also quickly became politically and militarily involved in operations carried out by the US and NATO. For example, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, it took part in peace negotiations after the First Gulf War and in the IFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995–96.

[15] 'Comunicat din 22 decembrie 1989 către ţară al Consiliului Frontului Salvării Naţionale', *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 1, 22 December 1989, Consiliul Frontului Salvării Naţionale, per: legislatie.just.ro.

[16] 'Romania's PfP Individual Partnership Programme with NATO is formally accepted', NATO, 14 September 1994, nato.int.

In April 1996, Romania formally applied to join the Alliance, but unlike Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, it did not receive an invitation to join at the NATO summit in Madrid in July 1997. Although France and many other European countries supported this idea, Washington made clear its opposition to enlarging the Alliance beyond the first three countries. For example, the State Department argued that the admission of Romania (and Slovenia) would force NATO to take a position on the issue of the future accession of the Baltic states, which US diplomacy wanted to delay as much as possible.[17] Moreover, the United States continued to view Romania with a certain degree of distrust, which was partly due to the Romanian government's ambiguous attitude towards the Soviet Union in the last two years of its existence: it sought to maintain the best possible relations with Moscow for as long as possible, especially in the defence sphere. Moreover, the FSN's programme also stated that the new rulers would "respect Romania's international commitments, above all those pertaining to the Warsaw Pact". In April 1991 Romania signed an agreement on cooperation, good neighbourliness and friendship with the Soviet Union, in which it committed not to join any alliances directed against that country.[18] The US also noted with concern that in the early 1990s, Romania had been moderately sympathetic to the rule of Slobodan Milošević in Yugoslavia, and had long refrained from openly condemning his policies or supporting UN sanctions against him.

Other factors that had a negative impact on the perception of Romania in NATO and contributed to the delays in integrating it included the slow pace of economic and systemic reforms, as well as the political and ethnic tensions that shook the country at the beginning of the transformation. On several occasions in 1990 and 1991, the government used miners to suppress anti-government demonstrations during the so-called 'mineriads'. In March 1990, bloody clashes between the Romanian and Hungarian populations erupted in Târgu Mureș: five people died and 300 were injured. Finally, Washington's attitude towards post-1989 Romania cooled over the resurgent cult of Marshal Antonescu, who was responsible for the murder of over 300,000 Jews in Romania and on the territories it occupied during World War II.[19]

17 Z. Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion: Four Case Studies*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 23, per: books.google.pl.

18 Договор о сотрудничестве, добрососедстве и дружбе между Союзом Советских Социалистических Республик и Румынией, Moscow, 5 April 1991, mid.ru.

19 For more detail see M. Shafir, 'Memory, Memorials, and Membership: Romanian Utilitarian Anti-Semitism and Marshal Antonescu' [in:] H.F. Carey (ed.), *Romania since 1989. Politics, Economics, and Society*, Lexington Books, 2004.

The setback of not receiving an invitation to join NATO in 1997 did not discourage Romania: it decided to deepen its cooperation with the Alliance even more, as was reflected in its gradual involvement in NATO's operations against Yugoslavia. In 1999, Romania made its airfields and airspace available to the Alliance. Romanian soldiers also joined the KFOR peacekeeping force that was established in 1999, and they have continued to serve in it ever since. However, it was not until 11 September 2001 that Romania's relations with NATO (particularly the US) reached a turning point. The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the subsequent launch of the so-called 'war on terror' prompted the US to significantly soften its stance towards the expansion of the Alliance. Later in September, the Romanian parliament voted to join this war as a de facto NATO ally, and agreed to provide its airspace, airports and land & naval installations to NATO's forces. A year later, Romania sent a contingent of almost 1000 troops to Afghanistan (increased to 1500 in 2009). In 2003, it also joined the so-called coalition of the willing in the US-led military operation against Iraq. Finally, in May 2003, the US Congress ratified the NATO accession protocols, and then in February 2004, the Romanian Parliament passed the law on joining the Alliance, which President Iliescu signed on 1 March 2004.

Integration with the European structures was marked by a similar dynamic to the process of joining NATO. In May 1991, the EEC-Romania Joint Committee held its first meeting; in December the same year, Romania officially applied to join the Council of Europe.[20] On 1 February 1993, Romania became the third country after Poland and Hungary to sign the Europe Agreement with the European Communities; this was an association agreement with the EEC that regulated the issues of political and economic cooperation and held out the prospect of membership in the Communities.[21] On 7 October 1993, Romania became the 32nd member of the Council of Europe; in June 1995, it submitted an official application for EU membership, also as the third country in Central and Eastern Europe. Immediately prior to this event, officials from 14 Romanian parties, including all those represented in parliament, expressed their full support for the country's accession to the EU in the so-called Snagov Declaration.[22]

[20] 'Report on the application by Romania for membership of the Council of Europe', The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 19 July 1993, pace.coe.int.

[21] Europe Agreement establishing an association between the European Economic Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and Romania, of the other part, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, no. L 357, 31 December 1994, op.europa.eu.

[22] *The Snagov Declaration*, 21 June 1995, p. 67, per: cdep.ro.

However, the rapid pace of integration that was seen in the first half of the 1990s started to slow down noticeably in the following years. In July 1997, the European Commission (EC) published an opinion on Romania's application for EU accession which concluded that the country was not ready to join the bloc due to several issues, including problems with respecting fundamental rights (especially those of the Roma population), corruption and the bad situation in the judiciary. The EC's assessment of Romania's market transition was no better. While it highlighted the country's significant progress towards building a free market economy, it also drew attention to its unstable legal system, problems with the protection of private land ownership and the inconsistent economic policies of successive governments. It said that Romania's accession to the EU would cause "serious difficulties to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union in the medium term", adding that much of the country's industry was outdated, and its agriculture needed to be modernised.[23]

The European Union declared that talks on Romania's membership in the European Union could only begin once the country had made sufficient progress in meeting the conditions of the Copenhagen criteria.[24] This assessment paled in comparison to the European Council's decision to start negotiations with Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus. It was not until the next opinion in December 1998 that Romania was found to have met the Copenhagen criteria, although at the same time the EC sharply criticised it for the lack of progress in reforming the economy, and even a decline in its competitiveness, while drawing attention to the need to fight corruption and make changes to the judicial system and public administration.[25] In December 1999, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Romania, and this process duly began on 15 February 2000.

[23] 'Commission Opinion on Romania's application for membership of the European Union', Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 15 July 1997, op.europa.eu.

[24] The Copenhagen criteria (actually the accession criteria) are the conditions that a country aspiring to EU membership must meet. The European Council defined them in Copenhagen in 1993 and then tightened them at the Madrid summit in 1995. They include the following: the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy; the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure & market forces within the EU; the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the *acquis*); and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

[25] *Regular report from the Commission on Romania's progress towards accession*, The European Commission, 17 December 1998, per: aei.pitt.edu.

Romania officially declared its intention to join the EU in 2007, but its inefficient judiciary and bribery continued to seriously threaten the pursuit of this goal. Emma Nicholson, the author of the report on Romania's progress towards accession which the European Parliament published in February 2004, explicitly stated that it would be impossible for Romania to complete its accession talks in 2004 and join the EU in 2007 if it failed to deal with the problems that had been identified.[26] Ultimately, despite many doubts regarding the rule of law in Romania, it managed to conclude its membership negotiations at the December 2004 summit in Brussels, and signed the accession treaty as early as 25 April 2005. To make sure that both Romania and Bulgaria would reform their judiciaries and rein in corruption, they were placed under the so-called Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) to track their progress in these areas. Under the CVM, both countries were obliged to prepare regular reports on the state of their judiciaries. For its part, the EC committed to overseeing the implementation of these reforms.[27] The decision to establish this mechanism was taken on 13 December 2006,[28] just over two weeks before Romania and Bulgaria were officially admitted to the EU on 1 January 2007.

[26] *Report on Romania's progress towards accession*, The European Parliament, 24 February 2004, europarl.europa.eu.

[27] 'Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania', The European Commission, commission.europa.eu.

[28] 'Commission Decision of 13 December 2006 establishing a mechanism for Cooperation and Verification of progress in Romania to address specific benchmarks in the areas of judicial reform and the fight against corruption', *Official Journal of the European Union*, no. L 354, 14 December 2006, pp. 56–57, eur-lex.europa.eu.

III. DETERMINANTS AND OBJECTIVES OF ROMANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Since the early 1990s, Romanian foreign policy has been consistently focused in the Euro-Atlantic direction. Its main objective is to ensure the country's security and strengthen its political, economic and cultural ties with Western Europe and the United States. This aligns with public expectations: in 2021 81% of citizens were in favour of cooperation with the US, EU and NATO.[29] To achieve this goal, Romanian diplomacy has focused on two priorities. The first of these is to develop cooperation and close ties with the US, especially in the area of defence; the other is to strengthen the country's position in European structures. The Republic of Moldova, which is culturally and linguistically close to Romania, also remains a special object of interest (albeit strictly in security terms), as the government in Bucharest is seeking to strengthen its influence in this country while limiting Russia's influence.

One of the most important elements shaping Romanian foreign policy is the sense of threat from Russia, which stems from the previously discussed negative experiences in its relations with this country, as well as their competition for influence in Moldova. The Russian factor, which helped to shape Romania's security policy in the 1990s and the early 2000s, became even more important after 2014 following the occupation of Crimea. This event dramatically reduced the strategic distance between the two countries: they are now separated by only 200 km (before the annexation the distance was more than 500 km). The fear of Moscow has been pushing Romania towards close cooperation with the US, which the Romanian government sees as a way of guaranteeing the country's security and bolstering its defence capabilities. Romania is aware that the limited military potential of both itself and other countries in the region makes close ties with the US and the presence of its troops on Romanian territory (and more broadly in the Black Sea basin and on NATO's eastern flank) the cornerstone of the country's security system. Close relations with the United States are also expected to help anchor Romania more firmly in the network of Western institutions and international ties. Romania sees its presence in NATO as a key instrument of its cooperation with the US. A 2017 remark by President Klaus Iohannis can be regarded as quintessential to the way Romania sees its American partner: "For us, US support means security, prosperity, freedom and democracy, and it guarantees that Romania will not return to the eastern

[29] A. Loy, 'Sondaj INSCOP: 81% dintre români sunt de părere că România trebuie să aleagă direcția VEST: UE-SUA-NATO din perspectiva alianțelor politice și militare', CaleaEuropeana.ro, 22 March 2021.

sphere of influence".[30] At the same time, Romania wants to see the stabilisation of southeastern Europe, and opposes any border revisions. To this end it has consistently supported the European aspirations of the Western Balkan countries: it perceives them as a factor that helps to normalise the situation in the region and prevent conflicts. Moreover, as a matter of principle, it has refused to recognise the independence of Kosovo, which also partly stems from the fear of Hungarian revisionism, as discussed further below. However, Romania does not have a fully developed strategy towards its Balkan neighbours.

The second priority of Romania's foreign policy is to develop cooperation and deepen integration within the EU, a process that Romania primarily treats as a tool for civilisational development that will permanently anchor the country in Western structures.[31] In this context, apart from the Russian factor, Romania's way of thinking about diplomacy is largely influenced by the country's specific sense of geopolitical and cultural alienation from the other countries in the region. Situated in southeastern Europe, since the 19th century Romania has considered itself to be part of the Romanesque and even Latin world in historical, civilisational and linguistic terms, despite the fact that Orthodoxy, which is followed by more than 80% of the population, forms an immanent part of Romanian identity. The official historiography emphasises the Latin and Dacian roots of the nation (see below) and considers it as one of the heirs to the heritage of the Roman Empire. Romania sees itself as an exclave, a 'Latin island' surrounded by the culturally alien Slavic peoples and the Hungarians.[32] This mentality is an immanent part of the Romanian national idea,[33] which was definitively formulated in the 19th century and causes Romania to naturally gravitate towards the Old Continent's western part, especially France and

30 This remark was made at a conference that was held in the US on the 20th anniversary of the strategic partnership between the two countries. See O. Posirca, 'President Iohannis: Romania has the biggest pro-American sentiment in the EU', Business Review, 8 June 2017, business-review.eu.

31 And also provide it with the necessary resources to address the country's infrastructural deficiencies inherited from the Communist period.

32 This feeling of 'geocultural' alienation is widespread both among the elites that take decisions on the country's foreign policy and among the general public. The Romanian people have little trust in the neighbouring countries, apart from Moldova. In a poll conducted in 2021, only 11% said that Bulgaria was their best neighbour, while 8% mentioned Serbia, 4% – Hungary and only 2% Ukraine. As many as 45% mentioned the Republic of Moldova, which is historically, culturally and linguistically close to Romania and is generally perceived by the Romanian population as part of Romania's national territory; more than 30% did not answer the question. These findings fit in with a popular Romanian dictum, which says that Romania's best friend and most loyal ally in the region is the Black Sea. See N. Bian, 'SONDAJ Ce aleg românii între SUA și UE / Rusia, considerată cel mai mare dușman al României / Cine are dreptate în conflictul dintre Israel și Hamas', G4Media.ro, 2 June 2021.

33 For more on Romanian national mythology and the specific identity of the country's inhabitants, see L. Boia, *Dlaczego Rumunia jest inna?*, Kraków 2016.

Germany, and to attach much less importance to relations with the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe.[34]

The Daco-Roman roots of the Romanian nation

Romanian historiography traces the roots of the Romanian nation back to the Dacians, an ancient people who from around 1700 BC inhabited Dacia, the areas north of the lower Danube that largely correspond to the borders of present-day Romania. In the early 2nd century, the Dacians were conquered by the army of Emperor Trajan, who defeated their last king Decebalus in fierce battles and annexed these lands to the Roman Empire. Following these events, the local population mixed with the newcomers to form the foundations of the modern Romanian nation. According to this myth, today's Romanians are therefore the heirs of the proud Dacians who heroically stood up to the army of the world's most powerful empire at that time, which was synonymous with advanced culture and civilisation. Romanian national symbols and public space commonly refer to both Roman and Dacian roots. The second verse of the national anthem explicitly calls for "giving proof to the world that the blood of the Romans flows in our veins" and that the Romanians "keep in their hearts the name of Trajan, triumphant in battles". Copies of the statue of the Capitoline Wolf can be found in many Romanian cities; the most famous one is located in the centre of Bucharest (Romania received it from Italy in 1906 to mark the 25th anniversary of the coronation of King Carol I and the 1800th anniversary of the Roman Empire's conquest of Dacia). Monuments and streets that honour both Decebalus and Emperor Trajan are also readily found in public spaces.

As Romania seeks to integrate with the EU, it has not shown any ambition to push any vision for the EU's development which would potentially put it in conflict with the EU's leading member states. Instead, it sees the EU as a forum for building the necessary coalitions to effectively achieve its own political goals. Therefore, inside the EU, Romania has followed a similar pattern to that in its relations with the US: it has tried to align its position with the bloc's key members, especially the views of the most powerful countries of the EU's so-called core, Germany and France. Importantly, as cooperation with the European Union and the United States is a priority for Romanian diplomacy, any

[34] The only exception is the Republic of Moldova, which as mentioned, Romania regards as its natural area of interest for historical and cultural reasons.

tensions that emerge within the Euro-Atlantic community are of serious concern to the government in Bucharest, which seeks to avoid having to choose between the interests of the parties while calling for unity and dialogue. However, if it cannot remain neutral, it usually leans towards cooperation with Washington, as it considers the US's security guarantees to be of paramount importance.

The third pillar of Romania's foreign policy is to forge ever closer relations with the Republic of Moldova, as the two countries share a common culture, language and a history of shared statehood. Romania has pursued this objective primarily through its efforts to anchor Moldova in the system of Western institutions and international ties while curbing Russian influence in this country – at almost any cost. This is why the Romanian government tends to unconditionally support those Moldovan political forces that even nominally declare an intention to follow the republic's pro-European course. Romania has taken numerous steps, mainly political and through the media, to reduce the risk that pro-Russian groups could take power in Chișinău. For many years, it openly supported the infamous Vlad Plahotniuc, who played a pivotal role in Moldovan politics in 2015–19. This billionaire, who was widely criticised in the West, deepened the oligarchisation of the state and blocked systemic reforms.[35] Despite this, Romania not only supported his rule, but also acted as his advocate to the EU and US.

Romania's actions regarding Moldova have also focused on building up Romanian soft power by facilitating the processes of 're-Romanisation' in Moldova. The government in Bucharest is also interested in its neighbour's integration with and ultimately its accession to the EU. It sees this as a way to bring the two countries even closer together and (through the resulting unification of the legal framework, the abolition of border controls and Moldova's inclusion in the common market) as a starting point for their potential reunification.

According to Romania's constitution and the 2012 ruling of its Constitutional Court on the settlement of competency disputes, foreign policy is the domain of the president, while the government acts to implement it. In practice, however, conflicts have frequently arisen in this field under conditions of political cohabitation. Despite these differences, there is a broad consensus with regard to foreign policy on the domestic political scene. The only party that

[35] K. Całus, W. Konończuk, 'Explaining Oligarchic Moldova', Carnegie Europe, 4 May 2017, carnegieeurope.eu.

has deviated from the mainstream to some extent is the national-conservative Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), which unexpectedly won 9% of the vote in the December 2020 parliamentary elections.[36] This party unequivocally supports the country's close alliance with the US and its presence in NATO, while at the same time advocating a more assertive course toward the EU[37] (although it has not called for leaving the bloc). AUR members have also been vocal in calling for the annexation of Moldova to Romania (in 2021, about 40% of Moldovans[38] and about 70% of Romanians supported this idea).[39] The 'pro-sovereignty' rhetoric has a certain appeal in Romania, where about a quarter of the population declares its scepticism toward Washington and Brussels. As early as in 2017–20, some politicians, especially those on the centre-left, used this narrative for the purposes of domestic political struggles. However, it is worth emphasising that they employed this rhetoric not because they actually wanted to weaken the country's relations with its Euro-Atlantic partners, but merely as a way of defending themselves against US and EU accusations that the Social Democrats were violating the rule of law.

Although the Romanian state covers a sizeable area and has a large potential, including in demographic terms, the scale of its activity in the international arena should be considered as rather limited. Since joining NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007, it has lacked any clear, ambitious goals. Arguably this stems mainly from historical reasons. Romania, which was established in the 19th century, has never played a leading role in the region. It has defended itself against external influences by adopting a reactive stance rather than trying to actively shape the reality in this part of Europe or initiate political processes. In effect, the main task of Romanian diplomacy appears to be to maintain (and possibly strengthen) the *status quo*, which the elite in Bucharest understands as the further development of Romania's relations with its Western partners, first and foremost the US, as well as expanding the military presence of the US, and more broadly NATO, on the Alliance's eastern flank, particularly on its section of the Black Sea. Romanian politicians have so far failed in their attempts to set more ambitious and long-term goals. One sign of this was the remark that President Traian Băsescu made in November 2013, saying that "after joining NATO and the European Union, the reunification with Moldova

[36] K. Całus, 'Wybory parlamentarne w Rumunii: sukcesy socjaldemokratów i nacjonalistów', OSW, 7 December 2020, osw.waw.pl.
[37] *Idem*, 'Nowy rząd Rumunii – kontynuacja pełna napięć', OSW, 31 December 2020, osw.waw.pl.
[38] *Idem*, 'Moldova: record-breaking support for reunification with Romania', OSW, 19 April 2021, osw.waw.pl.
[39] C. Melnic, 'Ce cred românii despre Unirea cu Republica Moldova?', Adevarul.ro, 2 June 2021.

should be Bucharest's main political project".[40] Although no one has formally disassociated themselves from the desire to pursue this intention, no real steps have been taken in this direction so far, apart from promoting the neighbouring state's integration with Europe.

Despite being the largest and most populous country in southeastern Europe, Romania has so far failed to offer its neighbours any formats for regional or sub-regional cooperation, except those within existing organisations such as the EU and NATO; these initiatives include the Bucharest Nine, which was jointly proposed by Romania and Poland. The Craiova Group, which includes Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, and Greece since 2017, was established on Romania's initiative in 2015 as southern Europe's answer to the Visegrad Group, but it has proved to be an ineffective project without any deeper substance. It has not been institutionalised in any way (for example, there is no rotating presidency) and its operation largely depends on who is in power in Romania at any given time: following the departure in June 2015 of Victor Ponta, Romania's then-prime minister and the group's founder, its activity was effectively suspended for the next two years.[41]

The absence of any clear involvement in the process of creating local formats partly stems from the fact that Romania has no such historical experience. As already mentioned, it has never played a dominant or initiating role in the region, and its foreign policy has been marked by a rather cautious reactivity and a tendency to exploit the existing international context to advance its own interests. Romania's geopolitical potential did not increase in any significant way until the late 20th and early 21st centuries, when a number of new, mostly smaller or poorer countries emerged in the region following the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Romania's position also strengthened as a result of its accession to NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007, as well as its rapid economic growth over the past two decades, which according to World Bank data averaged 3.6% per year between 2000 and 2021. Moreover, Romania apparently believes that the other countries in its region are so weak (politically and economically as well as militarily) that it does not make any practical sense to forge any initiatives with them that would be independent of the EU and the US. In fact, Romania's sole motivation to cooperate with its neighbours is the desire to strengthen its ties with the United States or the so-called hard

[40] K. Całus, T. Dąborowski, 'The president of Romania supports unification with Moldova', OSW, 4 December 2013, osw.waw.pl.

[41] V. Bochev, 'Craiova Group – too late or better late than never?', European Policy Centre, 6 December 2018, cep.org.rs.

core of the EU. For example, the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) probably appeals to the Romanian elite largely because the US has supported it and suggested that the investments planned within its framework, such as the Via Carpatia and the Rail2Sea project, could be used to enhance military mobility on NATO's eastern flank. Both of these transport corridors are important for the country's defence as they will allow for the redeployment of allied troops in the event that access to the Black Sea is blocked.[42] On the other hand, from Romania's perspective the economic dimension of the Three Seas Initiative is a secondary issue, as the country is more focused on tightening its economic relations with Germany and France.

Romania sees itself as an important actor which can help its Western allies, especially the United States, to ensure the stability and security of the Black Sea basin. As it is unable to counter the threat of Russian activity in the area either on its own or in cooperation with the countries on NATO's eastern flank, it seeks to act as a reliable partner and a bridgehead for the US & NATO on the Black Sea (a much less problematic one than Turkey, which has far more resources at its disposal but is more unpredictable). Therefore, it does not intend to participate in regional formats that could tarnish its image in the eyes of the West, such as V4 (for more on this, see Chapter V on Romania's relations with its EU partners). Romania's low activity in initiating new local structures also stems from the voters' scant interest in foreign policy. As a result, Romanian parties tend to focus on the domestic issues which are at the centre of the rivalry between the parties; this further reduces their appetite for participation in regional formats.[43]

[42] J. Pieńkowski, 'Rumunia wobec Inicjatywy Trójmorza', *Alert*, no. 4/2021, Collegium Interethnicum, interethnicum.pl.

[43] C. Ștefănescu, '„România nu are inițiative politice noi și proaspete"', Deutsche Welle, 12 May 2021, dw.com/ro.

IV. KEY DIRECTIONS: THE US AND COOPERATION WITHIN NATO

Relations with the United States have played a prominent role in Romania's foreign policy since the 1990s. At their core is security cooperation, which has been steadily developed.[44] Given Romania's limited potential, its government is aware that the close ties with the US not only strengthen Romania's position within the network of Western institutions and international ties, but also largely determine its relations with other partners, including China and Israel.

All the major political forces recognise the strategic nature of Romania's relationship with the US, and even the immediate interests of the ruling parties do not drive them to adopt confrontational stances towards Washington or try to challenge the position of the US as the country's only real guarantor of security. One example is the attitude of the centre-left when it was in government until 2019: after retaking power in 2017, it embarked on an intensive effort to undermine the effectiveness of the country's anti-corruption institutions. This was sharply condemned by Romania's Western partners, including the United States, who unequivocally supported the independence of the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) that was in conflict with the government. The Social Democrats rejected the criticism, but did not even try to suggest that similar practices could have a negative impact on cooperation between the two countries. Quite the opposite: the centre-left then took steps to strengthen relations with the US and to prove that its cabinet was in fact an ally of the US, in contrast to then-President Iohannis, who was in opposition to the government and supported the US narrative on the DNA.[45]

However, there are exceptions to the principle of Romania's submission to Washington's will. The most notable of these is Romania's consistent refusal to recognise Kosovo's independence, which it does in order to avoid setting a precedent for the Hungarian population that lives in the eastern part of Transylvania (the so-called Szekely Land) and has been demanding autonomy

[44] *Barometrul de Securitate a României (Octombrie 2021)*, Academia Română, October 2021, larics.ro.

[45] For example, let us look at the dispute over the relocation of the Romanian embassy in Israel. In 2018, this topic was a convenient tool for the Social Democrats in their political struggle against the opposition's centre-right president. The ruling party, which pushed the idea of moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, wanted to gain credibility in the eyes of the US administration and also portray Iohannis as a less reliable US ally. For more see T. Dąborowski, 'Rumunia: spór o relokację ambasady w Izraelu', OSW, 9 May 2018, osw.waw.pl.

for years.[46] Romania's consent to Kosovo's self-determination could also serve as an argument to legitimise the claims made by Transnistrian elites who have been demanding the formal independence of this separatist region in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, despite Romania's refusal to recognise Kosovo, it openly cooperated with NATO during the bombing of Serbia in 1999, and now actively works with other EU members on Kosovo-related issues; for example, it has participated in international missions in Kosovo, such as UNMIK, EULEX and KFOR.

Another example of Romania's assertiveness towards the US is the 2004 ban on the adoption of Romanian children by foreigners. This law, which affected 50,000 minors in orphanages, met with a negative reaction from Washington, as thousands of American couples had previously decided to adopt children in Romania.[47] The act was implemented as a result of pressure from the EU, whose officials had long criticised the government in Bucharest for its failure to clamp down on corruption surrounding the adoption process, which sometimes bore the hallmarks of human trafficking.[48]

The policy of close defence cooperation with the United States is supported by the public. Almost 74% of Romanians believe that the presence of US bases in their country will help defend it in the event of foreign aggression (the survey was conducted in January 2022, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine).[49] In October 2021, 70% of the population also declared that they had high or very high confidence in the US. Interestingly, when asked whether Romania should forge closer ties with Brussels or Washington, a plurality of Romanian people favoured the former option (24.5% vs 10.9%), although as many as 36.6% of respondents wanted to maintain close relations with both of them.[50]

1. Security cooperation

Romania's membership and activity in NATO are the main tools of its cooperation with the US. Not only has Romania traditionally supported Washington in

[46] See K. Całus, 'Cooperation despite mistrust. The shadow of Trianon in Romanian-Hungarian relations', *OSW Commentary*, no. 368, 4 December 2020, osw.waw.pl.

[47] 'Romania Bans Foreign Adoptions', Deutsche Welle, 22 June 2004, dw.com.

[48] The agencies that arranged the adoptions charged 'handling' fees ranging from $9000 to as much as $30,000 per child.

[49] 'SONDAJ A crescut încrederea românilor în NATO, UE și Germania / Peste 70% cred că România va fi apărată de NATO în cazul unui război în Ucraina / Liderii lumii în care oamenii au cea mai mare încredere', HotNews.ro, 26 January 2022.

[50] *Barometrul de Securitate a României (Octombrie 2021)*, *op. cit.*

its military operations, but since 2005 it has made its own military bases available to the US armed forces; since 2010, it has hosted US Marine Corps soldiers on its territory on a rotational basis. It has also agreed to the deployment of elements of the US anti-missile system at the Deveselu base. The two countries have also greatly expanded their intelligence cooperation, particularly in the Middle East, where Romanian intelligence already had an extensive network of agents and good situational awareness before 1989.[51]

The United States and Romania stepped up their defence cooperation to an unprecedented degree following the attacks of 11 September 2001. The Pentagon eagerly used Romanian assistance to deal with its logistical problems related to the redeployment of US forces to the Middle East. Washington also developed a new concept of global and European basing, which involved the establishment of small US forward bases in Europe, including Bulgaria and Romania. This allowed a rotating presence of US troops in these countries, as well as training and exercises to prepare the allies and partners for joint operations. The government in Bucharest reacted very positively to the idea of deploying US forces on Romanian territory, seeing this move as a way to reinforce its security guarantees. A bilateral agreement signed in December 2005 provided for the stationing of up to 2500 US Army troops in Romania and for the Pentagon to finance the modernisation of their bases.[52] Currently, the most important site of US deployment is the 57th Air Base Mihail Kogălniceanu near Constanța, a multi-modal transport hub for US troops, where some 1300 soldiers were on rotation until February 2022; the size of this contingent was doubled following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[53] The sense of security provided by Romania's accession to Western structures and the establishment of US bases contributed to the country's gradual reduction in defence spending, which fell from 2% of its GDP in 2004 to 1.3% in 2012.

[51] For more on Romania's agents in the Middle East, see L. Stan, R.M. Zaharia, 'Romania's Intelligence Services. Bridge between the East and the West?' [in:] *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 54, no. 1, January/February 2007, pp. 3–16. The cooperation between the intelligence services was also reflected in the presence of CIA prisons on Romanian soil between 2003 and 2005, see 'European Court Finds Romania Hosted CIA Secret Prison', Open Society Foundations, 31 May 2018, justiceinitiative.org. It should also be noted that officials from the US (primarily the CIA) and Romanian agencies (SRI, the Intelligence Service, and SIE, the Foreign Intelligence Service) meet regularly in both Bucharest and Washington.

[52] Agreement between the United States of America and Romania regarding the activities of United States forces located on the territory of Romania, US Department of State, *Treaties And Other International Acts*, Series 06–721, 6 December 2005, state.gov.

[53] It is also worth mentioning the air force base at Câmpia Turzii and the training grounds at Babadag (with railway infrastructure), Cincu and Smârdan.

The 2009 decision to build a US missile defence system in Poland and Romania was another important step that enhanced Romania's strategic cooperation with the United States. This idea also received full support from Romania, which led to another agreement with Washington in 2011. The first permanent element of the US military infrastructure on NATO's eastern flank, the Deveselu base, reached initial operational readiness in 2016,[54] despite repeated protests from Russia. This facility is designed to protect NATO's European members from short- and medium-range missiles that could be launched from the Middle East. The system includes a radar site in Turkey (which has been operational since 2011), a command centre in Germany, Aegis launchers on US warships off the coast of Spain, and land-based launchers in Romania. Another component, a base similar to the Romanian one, is being built in Poland and is expected to become operational in 2023. In addition to the aforementioned agreement, which has become the basic legal act governing the use of Romanian military installations by US armed forces, on 13 September 2011 the two countries signed a Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century. The document has already been renewed several times, most recently in 2019 during President Iohannis's visit to Washington. The implementation of this strategy is overseen by a working group that was set up in 2012 and is still active today. It is currently divided into six subgroups that deal with political and military issues, cyber security and digital business, economy and trade, energy security, cooperation in science and education, and internal & consular affairs.

After the 9/11 attacks, another breakthrough in NATO-Romania relations came following the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014. Romania felt clearly threatened by Russia's aggression against its neighbour, particularly its takeover of military bases in Crimea. It also became seriously concerned that the Kremlin could take equally aggressive action against Moldova in the near future, in which case Russian forces would arrive on Romania's eastern border. That is why, from the beginning of Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014, the Romanian government sought to bolster NATO's eastern flank and called for defence spending to be raised to 2% of the country's GDP.[55] The debate on this topic quickly accentuated the already visible differences in the perception of the Russian threat among the countries in the region. Poland and the Baltic states took a position similar to Romania's: they saw the Kremlin's policy as

[54] Several hundred US sailors and civilian staff members are stationed at the Deveselu base on a rotating (but permanent) basis.

[55] In January 2015, with the involvement of President Iohannis, all the parliamentary forces agreed on the goal of achieving a level of defence spending of 2% of GDP by 2017.

a risk to their own security and sovereignty. In contrast, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as Romania's neighbours Hungary and Bulgaria, considered the issues of migration, cyber security and terrorism as their priorities in the field of security. While they did not oppose the calls for a greater NATO presence in the region, they did not expect the Alliance to increase the size of its forces on their territories.

The Bucharest Nine (B9) was established in 2015 on the initiative of the presidents of Poland and Romania, with the aim of strengthening the region's voice within NATO. It is an informal group for discussing and coordinating the security & defence policies of the countries on NATO's eastern flank. In November 2015, Bucharest hosted the first leaders' summit of the B9, which also included Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria. Developing this format is high on Romania's foreign policy agenda: both President Iohannis and officials from successive governments have stressed its importance.

Due to the international situation and the growing threat from Russia, the US expanded its presence at the Kogălniceanu base by 175 soldiers in 2014. At the same time, the importance of this facility for the US increased following the termination of its lease of the Manas base located in Kyrgyzstan, which had served as a logistical hub for the mission in Afghanistan. In 2017, a US armoured battalion began its rotational presence and regular exercises in Romania under the new bilateral agreements. In parallel, NATO also stepped up its activity in Romania. Following the 2016 Warsaw Summit, Romania and Bulgaria were included in NATO's so-called tailored Forward Presence (tFP), which entailed an enhanced contingent of NATO's vessels in the Black Sea and the organisation of rotational drills of its troops. In October 2020, Romania's minister of defence and the US secretary of defence signed the so-called Roadmap for Defence Cooperation for 2020–2030, which outlined the strategic priorities for expanding cooperation in the Black Sea region. Only a few weeks earlier, batteries of the US Patriot anti-aircraft and anti-missile system, which Romania ordered back in 2017, had arrived in the country.

Romania has consistently encouraged Washington not only to further increase its troop numbers, but also to change the format of their presence from rotational to permanent. To this end, Romania is planning investments in its military infrastructure. The modernisation and expansion of the Kogălniceanu base is expected to cost the national budget more than €2.5 billion over the next 20 years. In March 2021, the defence ministry announced a tender worth

around €400 million for the expansion of this facility.[56] A further €200 million will be invested in the air force base at Câmpia Turzii by 2025–6; the US government will provide an additional $152 million for this purpose.[57]

Rising tensions between the West and Russia over Moscow's preparations for launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prompted Romania to step up its efforts to change the status of NATO troops on its territory and in the Black Sea from tFP to enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), which would increase their capabilities. Even before the Russian onslaught against its neighbour, Washington announced, to Romania's satisfaction, that it would reinforce the US contingent in Romania with some 1000 troops, while France announced it would deploy around 500 personnel to the country; US and French servicemen began arriving at their bases on 8 and 28 February 2022 respectively. After the war broke out, Belgium decided to send in an additional 300 soldiers as part of the NATO Response Force (NRF); the first group arrived in early March. As a result, since 24 February 2022, the number of NATO troops stationed in Romania has tripled to around 5000, according to a government statement from November 2022. Around 80% of them are Americans stationed at the Kogălniceanu airbase near Constanța; these include troops from the 101st Airborne Division, who were redeployed to the country in the second half of 2022. Since 1 May 2022, NATO has been in the process of setting up a 1000-strong battalion-size battlegroup based on the Alliance's troops stationed in Romania. France is the framework nation and has provided the most personnel (600 troops) for this battlegroup, which also includes the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, the US and Belgium (the Romanian defence ministry includes the latter as part of this force, even though it is not listed by NATO).

Determined to strengthen its position in NATO and spurred on by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Romania has also stepped up the modernisation of its army, although this process has been dragging on and suffering delays for a considerable period of time. Between February and August 2022, the Romanian armed forces launched tenders or signed contracts worth almost 5.4 billion lei (€1.07 billion), an amount eight times higher than in the previous two years. In August the state-owned company Romtehnica, an intermediary that procures weapons for the defence ministry, launched a procurement

[56] A. Andone, 'Contract uriaș: Armata a scos la licitație lucrări de peste 2 miliarde de lei la baza aeriană de la Kogălniceanu', Economica.net, 8 March 2021.

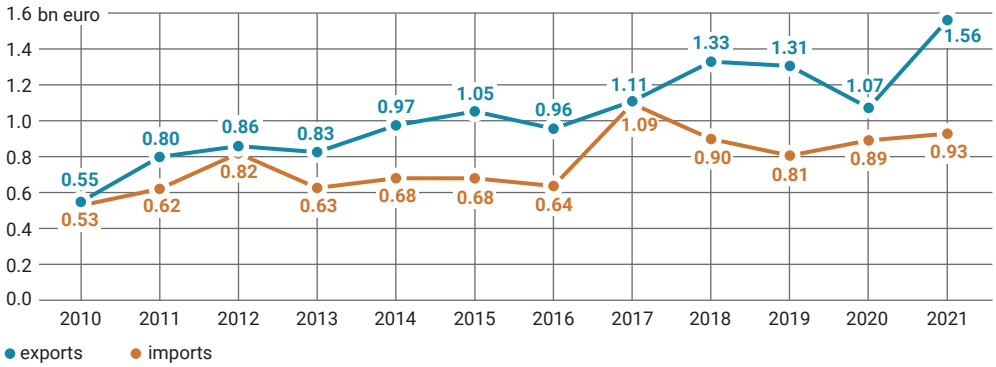
[57] N. Đorđević, 'USAF to turn Romania's Câmpia Turzii air base into regional NATO hub', Emerging Europe, 20 May 2021, emerging-europe.com.

procedure for 115–231 MANPAD systems worth 1.6–3.3 billion lei as well as H/V/UHF E-LynX and V/UHF Argus electronic warfare systems, worth 518 million and 447 million lei respectively. It has also been seeking to acquire four mobile radars for approach and landing guidance, as well as Scorpius systems designed to detect and destroy drones and other weapons (worth 242 million lei). In October 2022, the parliament in Bucharest also authorised the purchase of three Bayraktar TB2 systems (18 drones worth $300 million) and two Airbus H215M helicopters (worth $150 million). In December, Romania signed a €380 million framework agreement to purchase up to seven Watchkeeper drones made by the Israeli company Elbit Systems. It has also sought to speed up the acquisition of 32 second-hand F-16 aircraft (upgraded to the M6.5.2 version) from the Norwegian Air Force. The first of these jets are set to arrive in the country in late 2023; the transaction will cost €388 million. Finally, in January 2023 Romania signed a $208 million contract with Raytheon to supply an unspecified number of mobile coastal anti-ship missile batteries. Some of these purchasing decisions, especially those involving drones and MANPADs systems, have been influenced by the lessons learned from the war in Ukraine.

2. Economic relations with the US

The United States is immensely important to Romania as a strategic partner and security guarantor, but this has not resulted in a marked intensification of bilateral economic ties.

Chart 1. The value of Romania's trade with the US in 2010–2021



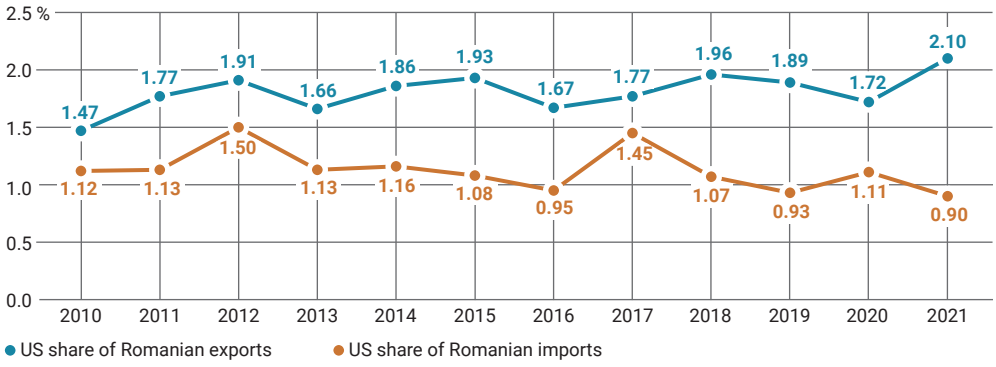
Source: data from the Ministry of Economy of Romania, imm.gov.ro.

In 2021, trade between the two countries amounted to just under €2.5 billion and accounted for 1.4% of Romania's total trade turnover. In that year, exports to the US totalled only €1.56 billion, accounting for 2.1% of Romania's exports

and ranking the US down in 15th place (slightly ahead of Moldova – *sic!*) among Romania's export partners. Imports from the United States did not fare any better, totalling €927 million in the same year, equivalent to around 0.9% of Romania's total imports, which put the US down in 20th place, behind Ukraine and other such countries.

However, US investments are becoming more important for the Romanian economy. In 2019, for the first time, the National Bank of Romania (NBR) provided a list of foreign investors which took into account the country of operation of the entity controlling a company which had invested funds, rather than just the country of registration of that company. The majority of investments originating from the US had been carried out by subsidiary companies registered in the Netherlands;[58] as a result it emerged that the US, which was ranked very low in the ranking of investors according to previous methodologies (it had been estimated that it had invested around €1 billion), should in fact have been ranked much higher. According to the NBR's new estimates, US investments accounted for 6.6% of all foreign investments; their total value of more than €6 billion put the US fifth among the largest foreign investors in Romania and first among those from outside Europe.[59] By 2020, this figure had risen to €6.8 billion. According to a study conducted by Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, around 900 US companies operate in Romania, employing a total of 102,000 workers.

Chart 2. US share of Romanian exports and imports in 2010–2021



Source: data from the Ministry of Economy of Romania, imm.gov.ro.

[58] M. Diaconu, 'BNR dezvăluie adevăratul top al investiţiilor străine în România', Ziarul Financiar, 11 October 2020, zf.ro.

[59] 'Investiţiile străine directe în România', Banca Naţională a României, bnr.ro.

In 2020, 49% of the companies with US capital operated in manufacturing (including automotive parts and fast moving consumer goods), 29% in food and agriculture, 9% in healthcare and 6% each in services and IT.[60] The last of these sectors is one of the most lucrative for US companies with investments in Romania, which include Microsoft, Oracle, Google, Amazon, IBM and Adobe. The United States is seeking to expand its economic presence in Romania, which is reflected in the repeated calls for its government to accelerate the privatisation process. In October 2020, the US ambassador to Bucharest Adrian Zuckerman reiterated this appeal, noting that Romania has the highest number of state-owned companies in the EU (over 1200).[61]

The two countries have converging interests not only in defence, but also in energy: they are interested in enhancing the region's energy security, primarily through the exploitation of new hydrocarbon sources, the expansion of cross-border distribution networks, and nuclear investments. For example, the US has openly supported Romania's plans to start extracting natural gas from fields located in the Black Sea as well as the directly related BRUA gas pipeline that will connect Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria.[62] However, cooperation in this area has not been as smooth as in the security field.

Over the past decade, deposits of natural gas estimated at about 170–200 bcm (equivalent to about 17 years of Romania's demand) have been found in the country's exclusive economic zone at the bottom of the Black Sea. The US-based ExxonMobil and OMV Petrom, the latter owned by Austria's OMV and the Romanian State Treasury, have been awarded the concession to explore about half of these deposits. Black Sea Oil & Gas (BSOG), a company controlled by the US investment fund Carlyle, has become another shareholder, holding the rights to fields of 10–20 bcm. It is estimated that the combined production from the newly discovered deposits would allow Romania to more than double its gas production, that is, to increase it by around 10–11 bcm per year. In 2018, work on the shelf slowed down due to the government's adoption of legal and fiscal regulations that were unfavourable to investors; they imposed an extremely high tax burden on extraction companies (Romania could claim up to 90% of profits from the exploitation) and obliged them to sell half of their gas on the domestic market at a lower price. As a result of these restrictions,

60 C. Radu, 'Tabloul economic al relațiilor româno-americane', Economedia.ro, 28 September 2022.
61 'Ambassador Adrian Zuckerman at the National Council of Private SMEs Awards Ceremony', U.S. Embassy in Romania, 30 October 2020, ro.usembassy.gov.
62 K. Całus, A. Łoskot-Strachota, 'BRUA i rumuńskie pomysły na środkowoeuropejski rynek gazu', *Komentarze OSW*, no. 365, 24 November 2020, osw.waw.pl.

the projects that had already started came to an almost complete halt. The law was sharply criticised not only by the two companies, but also by Romania's foreign partners, particularly Washington. OMV halted its investments on the shelf, while in January 2020 ExxonMobil announced that it would sell its own extraction licence.[63] Finally, the state-owned energy company Romgaz bought its shares at the turn of August 2022.[64] Meanwhile, in May 2022 Romania again amended its legislation governing the exploitation of Black Sea deposits, as a result of which the relevant projects resumed work. Just one month later BSOG launched production of 1 bcm per year.[65]

Another field of cooperation in the energy sector is the expansion of the Cernavodă nuclear power plant. Its two units, each with a capacity of 720 MW, were commissioned in 1996 and 2007 and currently provide about 20% of Romania's electricity needs. The plant's expansion, which began back in the late 1980s, envisaged the commissioning of two more units; the progress of this work has been estimated at 14–15%. The units that power the plant were built using the Canadian CANDU heavy water reactor technology, which has been used by companies such as Canada's SNC-Lavalin and China's state-owned China General Nuclear Power Corporation (CGN). In 2013, Romania started talks with China on the expansion of this project, but they were broken off in 2020 under pressure from the United States. On 9 October 2020, Romania's economy minister Virgil-Daniel Popescu and US Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette initialled a draft intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the field of civilian nuclear power development, thanks to which Romania will be able to use 'US expertise and technology' to renovate its power plant and build two new units. According to US statements, the €8 billion project will be coordinated by AECOM and implemented by a consortium of US, Romanian, Canadian and French companies. Popescu also signed a memorandum of understanding with the US EximBank on financing energy and infrastructure projects, including those involving nuclear power. Finally, in November 2022, Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă announced that EximBank would provide Romania with a loan of more than $3 billion to carry out the planned expansion of the Cernavodă power plant. Work on the two new units is expected to be completed by 2030.

63 *Ibidem*.

64 N. Banila, 'Romania's Romgaz completes takeover of Exxon Mobil's stake in Neptun Deep', SeeNews, 1 August 2022, seenews.com.

65 L. Ilie, 'Black Sea gas platform launched off Romania despite war risks', Reuters, 28 June 2022, reuters.com.

Meanwhile, Romania and the US began talks on the use of US technology to build small nuclear reactors (SMRs). In 2019, NuScale, a US-based company that operates in this industry, reached an agreement with Romania's Nuclearelectrica to cooperate in this area; two years later, the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) awarded the Romanian company a grant to prepare a list of sites where SMR-based power plants could be located. Finally, in May 2022, NuScale signed a memorandum of understanding with Nuclearelectrica to begin technical studies and create a regulatory framework for Romania's first SMR-based power plant. It will consist of six reactors with a total capacity of 462 MW, and it will most likely be built on the site of an old coal-fired unit in Doiceşti.[66]

3. Relations with China in the context of Romania's cooperation with the US

The growing rivalry between the US and China has prompted Washington to step up pressure on its allies' relationships with the Beijing government. Despite some perturbations and the need to navigate between the two powers, Romania has generally always sided with the United States, even when forces that favour closer ties with China (such as the Social Democratic Party [PSD] during the rule of its then-leader, Prime Minister Victor Ponta) held power in the country. However, they consider such concessions to be an acceptable price for US security guarantees.

One example of this Romanian attitude is the history of the aforementioned Romanian-Chinese cooperation on nuclear energy, which the US tried to block from 2019. Talks between the Romanian side and China on expanding the country's sole nuclear power plant at Cernavodă began back in 2013 (during the rule of the pro-Chinese cabinet under Ponta).[67] Negotiations dragged on but finally, in May 2019, the state-owned facility's operator Nuclearelectrica signed an agreement with China's CGN to build two new reactors worth nearly $8 billion, with the approval of the centre-left government. This development prompted the US to step up pressure on Romania. In August 2019, the United States put CGN on its blacklist of Chinese entities to which US suppliers could not supply components. At the same time Presidents Klaus Iohannis and Donald Trump signed a joint statement in Washington whose provisions included

[66] V. Spasić, 'Romania picks site of old coal power plant for first small nuclear reactor in Europe', Balkan Green Energy News, 25 May 2022, balkangreenenergynews.com.

[67] 'PM Victor Ponta: I want Romania to be China's best friend in the European Union, a political, economic, trade, cultural and artistic gateway', The Romanian Government, 30 September 2013, gov.ro/en.

the promotion of cooperation between the two countries in the civilian nuclear power sector.[68] A month later, US Energy Secretary Rick Perry and Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă, who represented the PSD and had previously been seen as a supporter of cooperation with China, signed a memorandum of understanding in the same area.[69] Finally, on 19 January 2020, Romania's new Prime Minister Ludovic Orban of the centre-right National Liberal Party (PNL), the party from which President Iohannis also hails, declared that his country would not continue cooperation with China on the expansion of the Cernavodă facility.

The cooperation with Huawei – which wanted to implement 5G technology in Romania, a country that is already one of the Chinese company's most important technology hubs in the region – has developed in a similar fashion.[70] Huawei has invested more than €1 billion in Romania over the past two decades and employs nearly 2500 people there. Its relations with the Romanian government were very good for many years; as recently as 2013, it concluded a memorandum of understanding with the government on cooperation in the IT and telecommunications sectors, including the development of critical information systems. However in August 2019, following mounting pressure from Washington, the US and Romania signed a memorandum of understanding on 5G technology in which Romania agreed to limit access to its market for companies with unclear ownership or those that may be under the control of a foreign government – which primarily referred to Huawei.[71] A statement released the previous day by Presidents Iohannis and Trump also included a passage on the desire to "avoid the security risks that accompany Chinese investment in 5G telecommunications networks". One sign of this was that even Ponta, who had previously supported cooperation with Huawei, said in March 2019 (when he was still a parliamentary deputy) that while Romania should be open to all contractors, "if America and Europe decide on something, we have to go in that direction".[72]

68 Joint Statement from President of the United States Donald J. Trump and President of Romania Klaus Iohannis, The White House, 20 August 2019, per: govinfo.gov.

69 'Vizita de lucru a prim-ministrului României, Viorica Dăncilă, în Statele Unite ale Americii', The Romanian Government, 24 September 2019, gov.ro.

70 A. Toader, 'George Zhang, Huawei: "We are counting on stable relationships and free competitiveness in Romania"', Bursa.ro, 2 March 2020.

71 M. Gongoroi, 'Memorandumul 5G cu SUA, desecretizat: România trebuie să evalueze furnizorii de echipamente – Document', Mediafax.ro, 3 November 2019.

72 O. Hațegan, 'Ponta, despre scandalul Huawei: România trebuie să fie deschisă la toată lumea, dar trebuie să țină, totuși, cu America și cu Europa / Fostul premier a încheiat memorandumul cu compania chineză, dar nu știe stadiul aplicării acestuia', G4Media.ro, 23 March 2019.

Romania's clearly pro-US stance on the Chinese-US rivalry was also reflected in its National Defence Strategy for 2020–2024, adopted in July 2020. The document emphasised that "the position of the US in the international system remains unthreatened, which is crucial from the point of view of Romania's national interest". At the same time, it pointed out indirectly that China's long-term policy and doctrine imply an intention to weaken US hegemony.[73] Romania's priority was to ensure the security of its developing 5G network, which signalled that Chinese entities would not be allowed to participate in its expansion. In April 2021, the Romanian government adopted a draft emergency decree that excluded Chinese companies from public tenders for infrastructural projects in Romania. It said that the right to participate in such tenders would only be granted to:

- companies from member states of the EU or the European Economic Area,
- contractors from third countries which have signed and ratified the Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) or are in the process of accession to the EU, or
- economic operators from third countries which have not ratified the GPA, but are signatories to other international agreements that give them free access to the EU's public procurement market.

The EU has reached agreements on this issue with 19 countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, Israel and Moldova, but not with China. Before the draft regulation was released, on 27 January the Romanian government adopted a memorandum in which it promised to implement legislation that would exclude companies from third countries (which are not party to the relevant agreement with the EU) from entering public tenders. In June 2021, President Iohannis promulgated the regulations that the parliament had passed in April; this definitively blocked Chinese entities, including Huawei, from participating in the expansion of Romania's 5G network.[74]

[73] The exact quote is: "US supremacy in the international system will remain unthreatened in the foreseeable future, which is a crucial element from the point of view of Romania's national interest. On the other hand, China's doctrine and policy objectives, designed for many decades to come, will increasingly influence how the US perceives the role of this country in the [international – author's note] system". See *Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării Pentru Perioada 2020–2024*, Romanian Presidential Administration, București 2020, presidency.ro.

[74] R. Marinas, 'Romanian president signs bill into law to ban Huawei from 5G', Reuters, 11 June 2021, reuters.com.

While this process was underway, Romania sought to defend itself against accusations that the new legislation was 'anti-Chinese'. Members of the ruling coalition argued that it was designed to exclude companies which are "unable to meet European standards" from tenders. In this context, they cited similar laws in other EU countries, pointing out that they do not mention any particular country explicitly. The leader of the co-ruling USR-PLUS bloc, Dan Barna, said at the time that the Romanian side was seeking to avoid delays in implementing the infrastructural investments (especially as the country "desperately needs to get them under way") as well as the risk of financial losses due to a given contractor's inability to comply with EU standards. Romania's actions were also in line with the recommendations of the European Commission, which has included equal access to public procurement in its ten key points for the EU-PRC dialogue. In response to the impeded access to the Chinese market for outside companies, in 2019 the EC published guidelines for member states on the participation of third-country bidders on the EU market. These included support for restricting access to tenders for entities from countries that do not have relevant agreements with the EU, as well as companies that underprice their bids or operate with low standards of workmanship.

The government in Beijing did not officially respond to the Romanian document. Only the Chinese Embassy in Bucharest issued a statement on this matter expressing its "firm opposition to the use of unethical standards and discriminatory regulations designed to exclude any country or company from the market".[75] However, the gradual curtailment of the freedom of operation for companies linked to the Chinese government has not had any noticeable effect on Romanian-Chinese relations, which remain at least amiable.

[75] 'Purtătorul de cuvânt al Ambasadei Chinei în România răspunde la întrebările cu privire la legea 5G', Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Romania, 11 June 2021, ro.china-embassy.gov.cn.

V. ROMANIA'S POLICY IN THE EU: 'BACK TO EUROPE'

The government in Bucharest sees EU membership primarily as a way to modernise Romania and overcome the underdevelopment resulting from its Communist past, as well as to anchor the country more securely in the Western civilisational space. EU membership provides Romania with access to EU markets (EU members accounted for 72.4% of Romanian exports and imports in 2021)[76] and allows Romanian citizens to emigrate in search of work.

1. Close to Berlin and Paris

Romania has consistently striven to be in the mainstream of European politics. Therefore, it has focused on close cooperation with the EU's largest countries, mainly Germany and France. It has explicitly expressed its support for closer European integration and the adoption of the euro: the government has claimed this could even happen by 2029.[77] It has also voiced its opposition to any ideas to divide the European Union, for example into the so-called 'multi-speed Union'. None of the traditional parties (apart from the AUR, which has been in parliament since 2020) are critical of the country's integration into Western structures. However, Romania was concerned by the signs of France's and Germany's cooperation with Russia which were evident until the latter launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Romanian governments have traditionally advocated a firm policy towards Russia: they did so even when Germany and France were promoting détente. For example, Romania supported the EU sanctions that were imposed on Russia both in 2014[78] after the attack on Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, and in 2021 after the poisoning of Alexei Navalny.[79] It has also supported each of the successive sanctions packages that have been implemented against Russia since 24 February 2022 (see Chapter VI.4 on responses to the invasion of Ukraine). Before that, it had also taken a strong stand against the construction of Nord Stream 2; during the Romanian presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2019,

[76] *Buletin Statistic de Comerț Internațional*, no. 12/2021, The National Institute of Statistics, insse.ro.

[77] The first deputy governor of the National Bank of Romania and the minister of finance provided this date in late 2021/early 2022. See 'Când ar putea adopta România moneda euro? Anunțul ministrului Finanțelor', Observator, 21 January 2022, observatornews.ro.

[78] J. Dempsey, 'A Who's Who Guide to EU Sanctions on Russia', Carnegie Europe, 20 March 2014, carnegieeurope.eu.

[79] 'România va sprijini sancțiunile UE impuse împotriva Rusiei pentru otrăvirea lui Aleksei Navalnîi', Agenția de Presă RADOR, 12 October 2020, rador.ro.

for example, it initiated changes to the so-called EU gas directive which were unfavourable to the pipeline's operator.[80]

Currently, Romania's most important policy goals within the EU include integrating the country into the Schengen area. It formally fulfilled the membership conditions back in 2011, but its accession has been held up by some member states for political reasons, even though the EU institutions have supported the abolition of border controls with Romania for several years now, while the European Parliament has repeatedly called on the Council of the EU to resolve the issue quickly (most recently in June 2021).[81] Over the past decade, the Netherlands has been the main and most persistent opponent of Romania's inclusion: its government has argued that the country has failed to meet the rule of law requirements.[82] Romania and Bulgaria were placed under the so-called Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) when they joined the EU in 2007, which allowed the EC to monitor their progress on judicial reforms and the fight against corruption. On 22 November 2022, the Commission assessed Romania's progress in this area positively and announced its exit from the CVM, which helped convince the Dutch government to change its position on the issue of Schengen enlargement. However, Romania's accession was then unexpectedly vetoed by Austria.

Austria justified its decision by citing concerns over the rising tide of illegal migration via the territories of Bulgaria and Romania. Austria, which is surrounded by members of the Schengen area, blamed the spike in migration on a faulty system of controls at the area's external borders and argued that as long as these are not sealed, the Schengen area should not be expanded. Romania reacted to these arguments with astonishment and incomprehension. Austria claimed that around 20,000 of the 75,000 recent migrant arrivals in the country had made their way through Romania, but the government in Bucharest argued that Austria had failed to provide any credible evidence to support these figures.

80 A. Łoskot-Strachota, 'The gas directive revision: EU law poses problems for Nord Stream 2', OSW, 21 February 2019, osw.waw.pl.

81 *REPORT on the Annual Report on the Functioning of the Schengen Area*, The European Parliament, 1 June 2021, europarl.europa.eu.

82 At the EU summit in Sibiu on 9 May 2019, Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte said that Romania would be included in the Schengen area when it complies with the rule of law and democracy. See 'Premierul olandez Mark Rutte, la summitul UE de la Sibiu: România va fi pregătită de admiterea în spaţiul Schengen când se va conforma regulilor statului de drept şi democraţiei', News.ro, 9 May 2019. However, it should be added that this opposition probably stemmed from (exaggerated) concerns over potential mass immigration and a resulting surge in crime in the Schengen area, including the Netherlands, following the opening of the border with Romania.

It insisted that only about 3% of irregular migrants had reached the Schengen area through Romania, as the main route passes through Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary. Austria's attitude caused bilateral relations to deteriorate, and even sparked calls in Romania for a boycott of Austrian companies.[83]

Romania's other priority in the EU is to maintain a high level of spending on the cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy: in all the negotiations, it has sided with those who have sought to strengthen them. There is also a consensus in Romania that in addition to earmarking funds for these areas, it is also necessary to boost spending on border protection and defence. In general, Romania has supported tighter EU cooperation in the security sector, including the mechanism for Permanent Structured Cooperation (the so--called PESCO), which was launched in December 2017.[84] At the same time, however, Romanian politicians have consistently emphasised that such initiatives, including the project for the so-called EU's strategic autonomy, cannot be implemented independently of NATO or act as an alternative to it, but should instead perform a complementary, auxiliary function to the Alliance.[85] For this reason, Romania welcomed the EU's 2021 decision to invite the US, Canada and Norway to participate in PESCO's 'military mobility' project, a strategic platform to enable the rapid and seamless movement of military personnel and assets within the EU using rail, road, air and/or sea transport.[86] Romania has also expressed its unequivocal support for the adoption of the single currency, although it is currently far from fulfilling the necessary convergence conditions.[87] Generally, there is no political controversy around the idea of joining the Eurozone, which is also supported by the majority of public opinion. According to a May 2021 Eurobarometer survey, 75% of Romanian people would like to see the implementation

83 See K. Całus, Ł. Kobeszko, 'Austria vetoes Romania and Bulgaria entering Schengen', OSW, 16 December 2022, osw.waw.pl.

84 J. Gotkowska, *The trouble with PESCO. The mirages of European defence*, OSW, Warsaw 2018, osw.waw.pl.

85 See R. Lupițu, 'Klaus Iohannis, despre autonomia strategică a UE solicitată de Emmanuel Macron: "România are un parteneriat strategic foarte puternic cu SUA"', Caleaeuropeana.ro, 19 October 2020; A.M. Touma, 'Romania Backs EU Military Cooperation Fund', BalkanInsight, 18 October 2017, balkaninsight.com.

86 'PESCO: Canada, Norvegia și Statele Unite vor fi invitate să participe la proiectul „Mobilitatea militară"', Council of the EU, 6 May 2021, consilium.europa.eu.

87 In 2019, the then prime minister Viorica Dăncilă declared that Romania could adopt the single currency in 2024. However this statement was largely political and lacked any economic basis, as Romania still does not meet any of the convergence criteria. According to a report leaked by the Romanian media, purportedly from the finance ministry, "in the perspective of joining the Eurozone, in the first phase Romania will have to restore its internal and external balance and meet a number of conditions for macroeconomic stability, while simultaneously combating the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic". For the time being, it is unclear when the new timetable for adopting the euro will be announced.

of this currency – the highest percentage among the citizens of those countries that are planning to do so.[88]

By joining the EU mainstream and maintaining the best possible relations with Germany and France, Romania primarily aims to make it easier to achieve its aforementioned objectives rather than to make any attempts to push its own vision for the EU's development. Romania's policy within the EU has so far been very conservative and reactive. However, it is possible that parties which call for more assertive relations with the EU's member states will come to the fore in Romania in the coming years. The popularity of these forces enjoys substantial social legitimacy. The politically motivated refusal to admit the country to the Schengen area and the years-long functioning of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism have made some Romanians feel that they are being treated as second-class citizens. According to the Romanian Security Barometer survey conducted in October 2021, as many as 54% of Romanian people felt that they were discriminated against in the EU.[89] The success of the Eurosceptic, national-conservative AUR in the December 2020 elections can be seen as an expression of growing frustration. The party won 9% of the vote and became the fourth strongest force in parliament, while in September 2022 its support reached around 15%.

For many years, Britain was a particularly important partner for Romania in the EU. The two countries grew closer for both socio-economic and defence reasons. Since the British market opened up to Romania, some 600,000 residents of this country have left for the UK in search of work. They have thus become one of the largest national minorities in the UK, alongside citizens of India and Poland, a fact that not even Brexit has fundamentally changed. By March 2020, some 540,000 Romanians living in Britain had applied to have their residency legalised and to be allowed to stay under the settlement scheme for EU citizens.

In terms of security the UK, along with France, is the most important NATO member for Romania after the US. It plays a leading role in the Alliance's nuclear deterrence and collective defence. Britain, like Romania, favours strong transatlantic ties and a meaningful US military presence in Europe, and has also been developing very close bilateral military cooperation with the US. British soldiers have also been stationed in Romania since the 2014

[88] 'Introduction of the euro in the Member States that have not yet adopted the common currency', The European Union, July 2021, europa.eu.

[89] *Barometrul de Securitate a României (Octombrie 2021)*, *op. cit.*

NATO summit in Wales. They are involved in the surveillance of the Romanian airspace and have regularly participated in exercises, and are also represented in the Multinational Division South-East (MND SE) in Bucharest. Britain's exit from the EU has not affected cooperation in this dimension. The Romanian government is aware that maintaining close relations between the EU and the UK is crucial from the point of view of European policy towards Russia, the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans. Romania believes that it is in the EU's interest to engage Britain in the Common Security and Defence Policy. It has been urging the EU and its member states to take an inclusive approach towards the UK in initiatives such as PESCO, the European Defence Fund and the European Defence Industrial Development Programme. It has also sought to sustain British interest in the Black Sea region.

EU countries are extremely important for the Romanian economy: in 2021 they accounted for 72.4% of the country's exports and 72.4% of its imports. The most important recipients of Romanian products are Germany (20.5%), Italy (10.5%), France (6.4%), Hungary (5.7%) and Poland (4%).[90] The first two of these are also Romania's main import partners (20% and 9% respectively). In 2019, around 62% of the country's foreign direct investment (€88.3 billion) came from the EU. Germany, Austria and France have been critical investors for years; in 2019 their shares of FDI in Romania were 15% (c. €13.2 billion), 11.4% (c. €10 billion) and 9.4% (c. €8.3 billion) respectively.

German majority-owned companies that operate in Romania, estimated to number around 4200, employ more than 200,000 people in the country. Among the ten largest, four are retail chains. In 2018, Kaufland ranked first with a turnover of €2.3 billion, Lidl Discount SRL ranked third (€1.7 billion), while Selgros Cash & Carry (€799 million) and Rewe (€742 million) placed sixth and seventh respectively. German retail companies that operate in Romania generated a profit of almost €500 million in 2018. Processing companies made marginally more, around €508 million. The largest company in this sector in terms of turnover (€2 billion in 2018), second only to Kaufland overall, is British American Tobacco, which is controlled by British American Tobacco Hamburg International GmbH. However, by comparison German investments in IT and communications seem small: German companies in these sectors generated a turnover of only €500 million in 2018, only 2.2% of the total turnover of German businesses in Romania.[91]

90 Data for 2021, Romania's National Institute of Statistics, insse.ro.

91 R. Grosu, 'Topul celor mai mari investitori germani din Romania', Wall-Street, 2 October 2019, wall-street.ro.

Alongside Germany, Romania's other key economic partner in the EU is France, a country with which it has traditionally had close relations since the establishment of the Romanian state. Around 2300 French-majority entities currently operate in Romania, employing more than 90,000 people. In contrast to Germany, French businesses have invested primarily in the manufacturing sector. In 1999, Renault bought a majority stake in the Dacia car factory in Mioveni and eventually became the owner of 99.4% of its shares. In the first 10 years alone, the group spent more than €1.2 billion on the modernisation and expansion of the Dacia plant, which became a major low-cost European brand during that period. Airbus Helicopters, which operates in a consortium with the Romanian company IAR, has also been present in Romania since 2002, as have financial (Société Générale), telecommunications (Orange) and retail (Carrefour) companies. The two countries have also been cooperating in the field of energy; on 26 October 2020, they signed a declaration of intent on cooperation in the sphere of civilian nuclear energy, including the expansion of the aforementioned Cernavodă power plant.

The Romanian vision for the EU's development basically boils down to ever-closer integration between the member states in the most balanced manner possible; this would include their adoption of the single currency as well as Romania's and Bulgaria's entry into the Schengen area. Romania certainly wants to avoid the 'two-speed EU' scenario, but if this proves impossible, it will definitely strive to be as close as possible to the countries of the so-called EU core, primarily Germany and France. This is one of the reasons why Romanian leaders have generally welcomed the idea of abolishing unanimity in votes on the common foreign and security policy in favour of qualified majority voting (QMV).[92] In May 2023, Romania attended a meeting of the so-called Group of Friends on QMV, which includes the likes of Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands; it did so as a participant for the first time, rather than as an observer as had previously been the case.[93] By falling in line with the mainstream narrative of the EU's largest member states, Romania has adopted a transactional approach: it expects to gain benefits in the areas of interest to it (such as the Schengen area, running certain institutions, obtaining access to EU funds, etc.) in return for supporting the vision of the community that

[92] Another reason is the desire to avoid situations where individual member states can block political decisions that are important for Romania, Austria's veto of Romania's accession to the Schengen area being one such example.

[93] 'Minister Bogdan Aurescu Attended the Informal Meeting of the Group of Friends on the Use of Qualified Majority Voting in CFSP Matters and the Launch of the Civilian CSDP Compact Respectively', The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 22 May 2023, mae.ro.

these countries have been promoting. While being in favour of a deeply integrated EU, Romania is convinced that it needs to maintain its good relations and close alliance with the US, particularly for security reasons. Romania has also supported the EU's enlargement, seeing both the Western Balkan countries and members of the Eastern Partnership (particularly Moldova) as its future members.

2. Wariness of regional initiatives

As Romania pursues its policy of maintaining the best possible relations with the EU's so-called hard core, it has tended to avoid entering into any formats of regional cooperation that could damage these relations. The evolution of its attitude towards the Visegrad Group (V4) is a case in point. For many years, especially during the pre-accession period, Romania wanted to work together with the members of this grouping, and even aspired to join it. However, the V4 countries were not interested in this, and Romania's perspective eventually underwent a major change. Currently, the V4 is seen in Romanian public discourse as a club of 'illiberal democracies' that contests the processes of European integration, which is at odds with the country's key foreign policy objectives.[94]

In December 2017, in reaction to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's alleged invitation to Romania to join the V4 (after having spoken vaguely to Romanian Hungarians about such a possibility during his election campaign), President Iohannis explicitly stated that there was no possibility of closer ties between Romania and the V4 at that time, because his vision of Europe's future was too different from that offered by the V4, especially Poland and Hungary. A month earlier, the then Romanian foreign minister Teodor Meleșcanu flatly denied that the country intended to join the group.[95] Nonetheless, Romania has gained some short-term benefits from its cooperation with the V4 by forming various coalitions within the so-called V4+ group. These are mainly aimed at formulating common positions within the EU on issues such as energy and climate policy, the budget, transport, and support for the EU's enlargement to include the Western Balkans. For example during the migration crisis in 2015, Romania, together with the V4, opposed compulsory migrant relocation quotas; in 2017, it supported the group's campaign against the so-called double

[94] A.M. Touma, 'Romania's Flirtation With Visegrad States Alarms Experts', BalkanInsight, 10 October 2017, balkaninsight.com.

[95] O. Nahoi, 'Meleșcanu: Nu se pune problema aderării la Grupul Vișegrad!', RFI România, 1 November 2017, rfi.ro.

standards for products sold in the so-called old and new EU.[96] However, the growing sectoral cooperation between them has not translated into broader political cooperation, such as joint positions on the principles for the EU's functioning in the future.

Romania's cautious approach to regional initiatives can also be seen in its initial attitude towards the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), which the country's political elite came to see as an alternative project to European integration. At its inaugural summit in Dubrovnik in 2016, Romania was represented only by its transport minister Petru Sorin Buşe. However, the Romanian government became deeply involved in this project as a result of the US's clear approval of this initiative, as confirmed by President Trump's visit to its Warsaw summit in 2017, the growing interest of Germany (on whose participation in the platform Romania had consistently insisted) and the lack of negative reactions from the EC. At the same time, Romania paid great attention to building up its positive image within the EU, and emphasised that the 3SI was primarily designed to develop transport & energy infrastructure, and had an important contribution to make towards European integration. As a result of the country's growing activity, in September 2018 the initiative held a summit in Bucharest which was attended by President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, the heads of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank, as well as German foreign minister Heiko Maas as external partners.

Currently, both the presidential office and the leaders of the governing coalition strongly support the 3SI, as opposed to the V4+Romania format. Romania is keen to highlight the synergies between the 3SI and B9. From the perspective of Romania's decision-makers, who have traditionally sought to 'securitise' existing cooperation formats, the Three Seas Initiative also has the potential to strengthen security in the region, in addition to its economic and infrastructural dimension. For example, Romania sees the Via Carpatia, the flagship 3SI project, as a route to increase the mobility of troops on the eastern flank, which fits in with both the mobility package and the concept of the so-called 'military Schengen'.[97]

[96] 'Visegrad group and Romania ask for EU regulations against food double standards', Romania-Insider.com, 22 September 2017.

[97] K. Całus, M. Gniazdowski, J. Gotkowska, 'Rumunia–USA: przedwyborcza intensyfikacja współpracy', OSW, 23 October 2020, osw.waw.pl.

VI. RELATIONS WITH SELECTED NEIGHBOURS

Romania has primarily been focused on developing its ties with the United States and the countries of the EU's hard core, and so it has not paid much attention to relations with its immediate neighbours. The only exception is the Republic of Moldova, which is an area of special interest for Romania for linguistic, cultural and strategic reasons. Relations with Hungary, which are burdened by historical issues and current problems largely related to the large Hungarian minority, can be described as individually challenging. Meanwhile, the biggest changes in recent years have occurred in relations with Ukraine, with which Romania shares its longest land border. After decades of resentment and even hostility, Romania has gradually (though not without some reluctance) come to see it as a country that needs to be supported and with which it should develop cooperation in order to ensure security for both Romania and Moldova and to maintain stability in the region.

1. Hungary: cooperation despite mistrust

Hungary is one of the most difficult partners for Romania in its neighbourhood. The complicated, centuries-long history of relations between them and the resulting resentments, as well as the large and politically active Hungarian minority that lives on the territory of present-day Romania, are sources of frequent tensions and conflicts, and dominate the narrow scope of their bilateral relations. The two countries have traditionally viewed each other with distrust, and their official contacts should be described as cool, especially since Fidesz came to power in Hungary in 2010.

The key historical issue that shapes bilateral relations is Transylvania (Romanian: *Transilvania*, Hungarian: *Erdély*). This region, which has been inhabited by both Hungarian and Romanian people since records began, is hugely important for both of these nations in cultural and identity terms. For a large part of the last millennium it was under Hungarian control, but after World War I it was annexed to the Romanian state (see below).[98]

[98] For more on Romanian-Hungarian relations, see K. Całus, 'Cooperation despite mistrust...', *op. cit.*

Transylvania and Romanian-Hungarian relations

In 1918, following the defeat of the Central Powers in World War I and the subsequent break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romania incorporated Transylvania, where Romanians already made up the majority of the population at the time. This fact was confirmed by the Treaty of Versailles that was signed a few months later; the final shape of the new borders was then legitimised by the Treaty of Trianon of 4 June 1920. Since 2010, Hungary has marked the anniversary of this treaty as a day of mourning, while Romania celebrates the anniversary of the incorporation of Transylvania (1 December 1918) as Great Union Day, the grandest and most solemn public holiday in the country. Politicians in Bucharest are very sensitive to any attempts to call the Treaty of Trianon into question (seeing any criticism of this agreement as historical revisionism) and to any expressions of Hungarian resentment related to Transylvania. Calls to resist Hungarian revanchism resonate with the public: almost two-thirds of the population express the belief that Hungary would like to regain control of this region 'in one way or another'. Therefore, successive Romanian governments have been eager to exploit them to mobilise their electorate and divert attention from domestic problems.

As a direct consequence of the border changes in 1918, a Hungarian minority of about 1.2 million people (c. 6–7% of Romania's population) lives in south-eastern Transylvania. This group is a regular topic of discussion and a cause of political conflicts that define bilateral relations between Romania and Hungary. The Hungarian government considers it a moral obligation to support the ethnic Hungarian minority who found themselves outside their homeland as a consequence of the Treaty of Trianon. In contrast, the overwhelming majority of the Romanian people see such actions as open meddling in their internal affairs. The Romanian Hungarians are well organised and have political representation in the form of three parties, led by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), which Hungary has openly supported both politically[99] and financially.[100] In May 2010, the Fidesz-dominated parliament decided to grant ethnic Hungarians who live in other countries the right to Hungarian citizenship, and to date at least half of the members of the

[99] 'Orbán in Transylvania Calls for Support for RMDSZ', Hungary Today, 9 May 2019, hungarytoday.hu.

[100] In 2018, the government in Budapest decided to provide €100 million in support to several organisations of the Hungarian minority in Romania, mainly UDMR and its affiliated entities. For more see B. Felseghi, 'Budapesta plăteşte o sumă-record pentru radicalizarea UDMR', PressOne, 4 February 2018, pressone.ro.

Hungarian diaspora in Romania have exercised this right. The strong links between Fidesz and the UDMR have elicited negative reactions from the government in Bucharest, which increasingly sees the Hungarian parties operating in the country as tools of Hungary's foreign policy.

Fidesz's takeover in Hungary in 2010 followed by the centre-lefts rise to power in Romania in 2012 brought an end to a decade of gradual improvement in bilateral relations that started in the late 1990s. During that period, political cooperation (especially on EU issues) as well as trade and energy ties developed rapidly. Both countries joined forces to push for the enlargement of the Schengen area and promoted the implementation of the EU's strategy for the Danube region. They also shared a common interest during the negotiations on the EU's multiannual financial framework. Their cooperation in the field of energy resulted in the launch of the first Romanian-Hungarian gas interconnector in 2010. The two countries also pursued the AGRI project to transport gas from Azerbaijan via Georgia & the Black Sea to Romania and Hungary.

In 2011, the policy of dialogue with Hungary that Emil Boc's centre-right cabinet had been pursuing came under attack from rival centre-left parties, which accused him of yielding to the government in Budapest. After Ponta's centre-left government took over Hungary heavily criticised its decisions, such as the withdrawal of support for a separate course for medical education in Hungarian at the University of Târgu Mureş and the change in Romanian electoral law from a proportional to a majority system, which allegedly disadvantaged the minorities. The issue of bringing József Nyirő's ashes to Transylvania under the patronage of the speaker of the Hungarian parliament emerged as a separate point of contention. The Romanian government blocked the ceremony, citing the Hungarian writer's far-right and anti-Semitic views.

The Romanian government has reacted particularly harshly to repeated calls for the creation of Hungarian autonomy on Romanian territory, which the Hungarian government has supported. The parties that represent the interests of the Hungarian minority, led by UDMR, have consistently voiced such demands. The Romanian government has fiercely opposed this idea, insisting that current legislation provides the minorities with an unprecedented array of rights, including the right for each of them to have political representation in parliament, subsidies from the state budget that are correlated with the size of each ethnic group, and extensive support for Hungarian culture and language, which is taught in Hungarian schools in Romania at every level of education. The UDMR alone received subsidies totalling some €6.6 million in 2020, almost double the

amount that went to the Save Romania Union in the same year, even though it received well over twice as many votes in the 2020 elections.[101]

There is no sign that the issue of the Hungarian minority will lose its central place in relations between Hungary and Romania in the foreseeable future. Romanian politicians have no intention of yielding to Hungarian demands; even more importantly, they have the support of the electorate. Merely considering the creation of such an autonomy would spell political suicide for any party (naturally excluding the UDMR). At the same time the Fidesz-financed minority, especially the political and cultural organisations that represent it, has been sticking to or even stepping up its rhetoric, which has further increased tensions both inside the country and in relations with the Hungarian state.

However, Romania's lack of trust in Hungary stems not only from historical reasons, but also from the ruling Fidesz's approach to Russia, a country that Romania sees as a threat. For years, Orbán's party has consistently sought to strengthen Hungary's relations with Russia and sometimes explicitly defended its interests in the European and international arena; for example, it has opposed some EU sanctions and obstructed Ukraine's cooperation with NATO,[102] which the Romanian government has been watching with unease. This impression has been reinforced by Hungary's ambiguous stance towards the invasion of Ukraine, especially its continued energy cooperation with Russia and its refusal to let Western arms supplies to Ukraine pass through its territory. In this context, the Romanian government reacted particularly harshly to Orbán's speech in the Transylvanian town of Băile Tuşnad (Hungarian Tusnádfürdő) on 23 July 2022,[103] in which he described NATO's and the EU's current strategy towards Russia as a failure, and announced that Hungary would seek to change it on the premise that its goal should be to make peace rather than win the war. He insisted that the EU should therefore stand "not on the side of Ukraine, but between it and Russia", and that peace talks should take place not between the parties to the conflict, but between Washington and Moscow.

Romania does not seem to have a defined strategy for cooperation with Hungary. It sees the country as one of its many partners within the EU and NATO rather than a reliable ally. Romania has traditionally been keen to remain in

[101] M. Mihalache, 'UDMR, ventuză bugetară cu statut dublu', Jurnalul.ro, 27 January 2021.

[102] 'Hungary vetoes NATO statement on Ukraine over minority rights: minister', Reuters, 30 October 2019, reuters.com.

[103] A. Sadecki, K. Całus, Ł. Kobeszko, 'Wystąpienie programowe Orbána w Siedmiogrodzie', OSW, 2 August 2022, osw.waw.pl.

the European mainstream, so the fact that Orbán's government has been in permanent conflict with the European Commission has further discouraged it from developing its ties with Hungary.

Despite the political problems and recurring diplomatic wrangling, their cooperation in the fields of the economy (including trade), energy and tourism has been expanding rapidly. In 2021, Hungary was the fourth biggest recipient (5.7% of the total) of Romanian exports after Germany, Italy and France and the third biggest in terms of imports (6.9% of the total). The number of Hungarian tourists who used registered accommodation in Romania reached 156,000[104] in the pre-pandemic year of 2019, putting them third among visitors from the EU and fifth globally. One example of the growing energy cooperation between the two countries is the aforementioned project for the BRUA gas transit pipeline to connect Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria.[105] The €479 million venture has been financed by a €180 million grant from the European Commission and loans from the European Investment Bank (€50 million) as well as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (€60 million). Its most important component is a 479 km-long gas pipeline that runs from the Romanian--Bulgarian interconnector at Podișor near Bucharest to Recaș, some 50 km from the Serbian-Hungarian border. Hungary has consistently stressed its 'unwavering' commitment to the project, arguing that it will ensure Hungary's energy security by diversifying its sources of gas supply.

2. Moldova: between romanticism and pragmatism

The Republic of Moldova is one of the priority areas for Romania's foreign policy, along with Euro-Atlantic integration. The special attention that Romania pays to Moldova stems from historical grounds. The two countries are linked by language and culture as well as the experience of shared statehood. This proximity helps to foster bilateral relations, but also carries a significant burden. A large part of Moldovan society, especially its Russian-speaking minority, is wary of closer ties with Romania; they see it as an attempt to 'shove' Moldova into NATO, a threat to the country's independence and a prelude to unification with its western neighbour. The resulting problems have affected all areas of bilateral relations: politics, military affairs, and to a lesser extent the economy.

[104] *Turismul României, Breviar Statistic*, The National Institute of Statistics, 2019, insse.ro.
[105] K. Całus, A. Łoskot-Strachota, 'BRUA i rumuńskie pomysły na środkowoeuropejski rynek gazu', *op. cit.*

Between the 14th and 19th centuries, the territory of today's Republic of Moldova, with the exception of Transnistria on the left bank of the Dniester, was part of the Moldavian Hospodarate, one of the two principalities (along with Wallachia) which unified to form the modern Romanian state in the second half of the 19th century. In 1812 these lands were detached from the Hospodarate and annexed to the Russian Empire. They returned to Romania in 1918 and remained within its borders until 1940, when the Soviet Union annexed them under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

From Romania's perspective, the independent Republic of Moldova, which was established in 1991 and where Romanian speakers currently account for about 80% of the population, is a second Romanian state. In the eyes of the Romanian political elite and the vast majority of the country's population, the Moldovans are compatriots who live in historically Romanian territories that were forcibly separated from the motherland. As a result, the government in Bucharest does not recognise the distinctiveness of the Moldovan people, and considers Moldovan identity (like Wallachian and Transylvanian identity) as merely a kind of regional identity; it also counts residents of the Republic of Moldova who declare themselves as 'Moldovans' as part of the Romanian nation. In addition to historical issues, Romania's course towards Moldova is determined by the presence of Russian troops on its territory, in the internationally unrecognised Transnistria. Although their numbers are small (probably around 1600 soldiers), from the Romanian government's point of view the very existence of Russian military installations only about 100 kilometres from Romania's borders poses a threat to the country's security.

The Romanian government's interest in Moldova also has its sources in domestic politics. Romanian citizens overwhelmingly expect those in power to take steps aimed at closer cooperation with Moldova and drawing it towards Romania. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, around 70% of Romanians (but only 35% of Moldovans) were in favour of the reunification of both countries.[106] For this reason, the topic of Moldova has traditionally featured in the rhetoric of Romanian elites and served as a tool of political struggle. During the 2014 presidential elections opponents accused Iohannis, who was running for the post, of never having visited the Republic of Moldova. In response, he declared almost immediately that if he became head of state, his first trip would

[106] For more see K. Całus, 'Moldova: record-breaking support for reunification with Romania', OSW, 19 April 2021, osw.waw.pl; C. Melnic, 'Ce cred românii despre Unirea cu Republica Moldova?', LARICS, 2 June 2021, per: adevarul.ro.

be to Chișinău. He also said that "without the votes of the people of Bessarabia, no president of Romania will be a president in full!".[107] Prior to that, the PSD leader Ponta and President Băsescu for years had fiercely competed for the label of who was most committed to helping Romania's eastern neighbour. Another reason why Moldovan issues feature prominently on the agendas of leading Romanian politicians is the growing Moldovan electorate, as more and more of them have been acquiring Romanian passports and voting rights.

As mentioned, Romania's primary objective vis-à-vis Moldova is to anchor it as firmly as possible in the system of Western institutions and international links. To this end, Romania has assisted it in its efforts to join the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the World Trade Organisation; it has also been the biggest promoter of Moldova's European integration, as well as its main advocate in the EU. Moreover, Romania supported its neighbour's efforts to quickly sign the Association Agreement with the EU, as well as the part called the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), which it did in 2014. Romania also lobbied for Moldova's inclusion in the Danube Strategy. Finally in 2009, Bucharest was the main initiator and founder of the so-called Group of Friends of Moldova (the Group for the European Action of Moldova) in the EU.

At the same time, Romania has sought to counter any moves to deepen Moldova's integration with Russian-led organisations, primarily the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Romania was highly critical of Moldova's 1994 ratification of the Belovezha Accords and the CIS Statute, which formally confirmed its accession to this organisation; in 2018, it similarly voiced opposition when Moldova received observer status in the EEU. Romania has also firmly resisted the idea of resolving the Transnistria issue through so-called federalisation, which Russia has consistently promoted. Under such a model this separatist and extremely pro-Russian region, as an entity of federal Moldova, would gain the right to block the Moldovan government's decisions in several areas, including foreign policy.[108] From Romania's point of view, such a situation would formalise the Kremlin's influence in Moldova and block this country's European aspirations.

[107] R. Lozinschi, 'Klaus Iohannis: „Fără votul basarabenilor, niciun președinte al României nu ar fi un președinte împlinit!"', Ziarul Național, 29 October 2014, ziarulnational.md.

[108] The so-called Kozak memorandum, which Russia was pushing in 2003, illustrates how it sees the solution to the Transnistria problem. The document not only gave the separatist parastate the right to veto decisions related to Moldova's international policy, but also legalised the presence of Russian peacekeepers (as guarantors of the new agreement) on the territory of the unified state for at least 20 years. From the Kremlin's perspective, the federalisation of Moldova carried out along these lines would ensure its continued neutrality, and would realistically block any attempts to integrate it into Western (European and Euro-Atlantic) structures.

Romania's 'passportisation' of Moldovans

The issue of granting Romanian passports to large numbers of Moldovan residents is a very important part of Romania's policy towards Moldova. In 1991, the Romanian parliament passed legislation which provides all former Romanian citizens who had lost their citizenship against their will, as well as their descendants, with the opportunity to regain it. From the government's perspective, the law was meant to remedy the 'historical injustice' of 1940 when residents of the territories annexed by the Soviet Union were deprived of their Romanian citizenship. In practice, the right to enjoy this privilege was granted to the vast majority of the Republic of Moldova's residents. According to Romanian data from mid-2022, about 1 million Moldovans out of the country's total population of 2.6 million held Romanian passports. On the one hand, it is an important part of Romanian foreign policy to deepen ties between the two countries as much as possible, but their actual reunification in the foreseeable future does not seem to lie within Romania's real aspirations. On the other hand, the large--scale granting of passports to Moldovan citizens means that Romanian politicians are increasingly vying for their votes. Back in 2012, then-President Băsescu went to Chișinău to campaign ahead of a referendum on removing him from office. In 2014, Moldova's Democratic Party (which was part of the governing coalition at the time, and since late 2015/early 2016 has been a major player on the domestic political scene) signed a cooperation agreement with Romania's ruling PSD, which provided for its assistance in the organisation of PSD's election campaign on Moldovan territory. Romanian presidential candidates have also repeatedly sought the support of the republic's population. Băsescu, a staunch proponent of the reunification of Romania and Moldova, applied for Moldovan citizenship for many years in order to emphasise his views and attract the attention of the electorate. He managed to obtain it in 2016, but only temporarily: just a year later, the country's pro-Russian President Igor Dodon stripped him of his Moldovan citizenship. Nonetheless, this episode demonstrates the importance of relations with Moldova for members of the Romanian political class and their attitudes towards the Moldovan issue.

Romania has also been striving to strengthen its neighbour's defence capabilities, but it has been rather ineffective in this regard. Moldova is a formally neutral state, which limits its involvement in military projects. Its openness to such cooperation also depends on the political option that is in power at

any given time: pro-Russian forces naturally view Romanian defence initiatives with a great deal of suspicion. Despite this, Romanian and Moldovan soldiers have repeatedly taken part in joint military exercises over the past few years.[109] In February 2018, the two sides also resumed talks on establishing a joint battalion for use in emergency situations; in November 2018, border guards from both countries began joint patrols of their shared border. Since 24 February 2022, Moldova has been gradually changing its approach to its own neutrality (which was previously understood as *de facto* disarmament) by embarking on the modernisation of its tiny and underinvested armed forces, which only number about five to six thousand troops.[110] Although Romania has expressed its clear support for this initiative,[111] Moldova has not received any significant assistance in equipment from its neighbour. Meanwhile, for comparison, in October 2022 Germany began transferring 19 Piranha 3H armoured personnel carriers to the Moldovan army, while Brussels has earmarked over €40 million (equivalent to 80% of the country's 2022 defence budget) under the European Peace Facility to purchase non-lethal military equipment for the Moldovan armed forces and to strengthen its capabilities in logistics, command, communications, cyber defence and unmanned aerial reconnaissance.

Romania is also keen to strengthen its economic cooperation with Moldova and increase its share in Moldova's trade in goods while reducing its neighbour's trade ties with Russia. These efforts have clearly brought the two countries closer, expanded Romania's political influence over its neighbour and weakened the influence of Russia, which was Moldova's main trading partner for many years. This strategy has yielded tangible results over the past decade; the key factor in its success was Moldova's inclusion in the DCFTA (see Tables 1 and 2). Back in 2014, Romania overtook Russia to become the main recipient of Moldovan exports, and the next year it also became Moldova's largest importer.

[109] M. Necsutu, ''Political War' in Moldova Threatens Army', BalkanInsight, 20 October 2017, balkaninsight.com.

[110] For more detail see K. Całus, 'More independence, less fear. Moldova's perspective on Russia after a year of war in Ukraine', *OSW Commentary*, no. 490, 20 February 2023, osw.waw.pl.

[111] 'Romania's defense minister declares Bucharest's support in reforming Moldova's national army', Infotag, 2 May 2023, infotag.md.

Table 1. Romania's and Russia's share of Moldovan exports between 2012 and 2022

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Romania	16.5%	16.9%	18.6%	22.7%	25.1%	24.8%	29.3%	27.5%	29.0%	26.5%	28.6%
Russia	30.3%	26.0%	18.1%	12.2%	11.4%	10.5%	8.1%	9.0%	9.0%	8.8%	4.4%

Table 2. Romania's and Russia's share of Moldovan imports between 2012 and 2022

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Romania	11.9%	13.2%	15.1%	13.9%	13.7%	14.4%	14.6%	14.4%	12.0%	12.0%	17.9%
Russia	15.7%	14.4%	13.5%	13.4%	13.3%	11.8%	12.5%	11.8%	11.0%	15.0%	12.4%

Source: Romania's National Institute of Statistics, insse.ro.

Romania has also focused on strengthening its soft power in the Republic of Moldova by rebuilding the Romanian identity (a kind of 're-Romanisation') of the country's population. It has supported cultural projects, financed scholarships for Moldovan pupils and students to learn in Romania (according to a protocol on cooperation between the two countries' ministries of education for 2022–26, the programme covers about 2500 people)[112] and supplied local libraries and schools with history books and textbooks written by Romanian historians, especially those who promote Moldova's national idea.

As part of these efforts to build its soft power, Romania has also allocated funds for Moldova's development. Its official development assistance (ODA) to its neighbour was worth $384 million between 2012 and 2021, accounting for nearly 70% of its total ODA to foreign beneficiaries.[113] In 2010, when a nomi-

[112] T. Serban, 'România va acorda anual 2.550 de burse pentru elevi și studenți din Republica Moldova', Ziare.com, 11 February 2022. In the previous years, the number of scholarships was similar: see România și Republica Moldova continuă colaborarea în domeniul educației în perioada 2016–2019, The Romanian Government, 28 September 2016, gov.ro.

[113] See 'Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions', The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, stats.oecd.org.

nally pro-European, Romania-friendly ruling coalition came to power in Moldova, the Romanian government decided to launch a €100 million programme of non-refundable financial assistance for the country, but managed to use only 30% of this amount over the next 10 years. In January 2022, six months after the formation of the pro-European government led by Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilița, the Romanian government relaunched this programme and again offered Moldova €100 million in non-refundable assistance.[114] Just a month later, the two countries also signed a 13-point declaration, in which they agreed to reduce mobile-phone roaming fees, cooperate in the education sector (including by sending Romanian teachers to Moldova), conduct training for Moldovan administration employees and cooperate in the field of justice.[115] Another example of Romania's efforts to build its soft power in Moldova is the support it provided to this country during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. On 30 April 2020, a team of 42 doctors and a shipment of medical equipment arrived in Chișinău, and on 6 May (the 30th anniversary of the event known as the 'bridge of flowers') a convoy of 20 trucks carrying aid worth about €3.5 million set off for Moldova.[116] Later, in February 2021, the Romanian government began providing free vaccines to its neighbour; by June 2021 it had supplied more than 400,000 doses.

Romanian governments seek to maintain its influence on the situation in Moldova while keeping it as far away from Russia as possible. To this end, they tend to unconditionally support those political forces which promise that Moldova will, at least nominally, maintain its pro-European and Romania-friendly course, which promote the 'Romanianness' of the Moldovan nation and language (or at least do not deny it), and which prevent pro-Russian groups from taking power. This is why for many years Romania openly (both politically and through its media)[117] supported the corrupt and discredited – but formally pro-European – billionaire Vlad Plahotniuc,[118] who effectively ruled Moldova from 2015 to 2019. This widely criticised politician caused the country to become

114 N. Banila, 'Romania to grant 100 mln euro aid to Moldova to enhance cooperation', SeeNews, 20 January 2022, seenews.com.

115 'Republica Moldova a găzduit ședința comună a guvernelor de la Chișinău și București. Prim-ministra Natalia Gavrilița: „Drumul nostru în Europa, trece prin România"', The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 11 February 2022, gov.md.

116 A. Vasilache, 'România, ajutor umanitar de 16,5 milioane lei pentru Republica Moldova: 20 de camioane cu medicamente și dispozitive medicale au plecat miercuri spre Chișinău', HotNews.ro, 6 May 2020.

117 In October 2019, the funding of media outlets that supported Plahotniuc from the Romanian budget was mentioned by Ludovic Orban, the head of the PNL who was then appointed Prime Minister. See 'Liderul PNL: În Republica Moldova au fost finanțate televiziuni, site-uri de știri care îl preamăreau pe dictatorul Plahotniuc', Digi24, 17 October 2019, digi24.ro.

118 'Public Designation, Due to Involvement in Significant Corruption, of Former Moldovan Official Plahotniuc', U.S. Department of State, 13 January 2020, 2017–2021.state.gov.

deeply oligarchised while systemic reforms were stalled.[119] Despite this, the Romanian government, which saw him as the only force that could block the pro-Russian Party of Socialists from gaining power at that time, not only supported his rule but also acted as his advocate in the EU and the US.[120]

The Romanian elite has traditionally been very distrustful of Moldovan parties and politicians that promote Moldovanism, a philosophy which asserts that the Moldovan and Romanian peoples and languages are separate, which Romanian politicians have vehemently opposed. As a result, the intensity and temperature of bilateral relations and the scale of Romanian commitment in Moldova, including financial support, have depended on the orientation of those in power in Chișinău. For example, relations cooled seriously in late 2019/early 2020 when the cabinet of Ion Chicu, which was in fact controlled by the pro-Russian President Dodon and the Party of Socialists, came to power after almost a decade of governments led by pro-European forces.[121] Romania did not hide its dissatisfaction with this turn of events; on the contrary, it pointedly expressed it. In January 2020, President Iohannis announced publicly that he was not sure whether the government in Chișinău was pursuing European integration, and that Romania would therefore confine its assistance to its neighbour only to projects aimed directly at its citizens.[122] Just a few days earlier, the Romanian prime minister had been equally critical of the new Moldovan government, saying that he did not consider Chicu's cabinet to be a serious partner.[123] When the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won an absolute majority of 63 seats in the 101-seat Moldovan parliament in early elections in July 2021, relations between the two countries warmed considerably.[124]

119 For more on the specific features of Plahotniuc's rule, see K. Całus, 'Moldova: from oligarchic pluralism to Plahotniuc's hegemony', *OSW Commentary*, no. 208, 11 April 2016, osw.waw.pl.

120 Interestingly, many politicians in Bucharest were inclined to support Plahotniuc rather than the genuinely pro-Western factions then emerging, such as the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), and similary inclined people such as PAS's leader Maia Sandu. This was because Romanian leaders had long assumed that these pro-Western forces, despite their pure intentions, would not be able to hold on to power and resist the Russian threat.

121 K. Całus, 'Moldova: parliament approves a new government linked with pro-Russian socialists', OSW, 14 November 2019, osw.waw.pl.

122 'Klaus Iohannis, nemulțumit de guvernul de la Chișinău: Nu suntem convinși că își doresc un parcurs european', Digi24, 16 January 2020, digi24.ro.

123 'Ludovic Orban, despre Guvernul Chicu: „Nu putem să considerăm un partener serios actualul Guvern"', Unimedia, 9 January 2020, unimedia.info.

124 It should also be noted that Romania long viewed this party and Sandu herself with suspicion. The Romanian elites were inclined to support Plahotniuc rather than the pro-Western PAS, which had no links to the oligarchic circles and faced no accusations of corruption, but was considered ineffective and incapable of taking power. Moreover, Plahotniuc's Democratic Party maintained close ties with Romania's centre-left Social Democratic Party, and was long seen as representing its interests in Moldova.

Romania has played a positive and effective role in strengthening Moldova's ties with Western structures, but its effectiveness in other areas of bilateral cooperation has been limited. It has provided little technical assistance to Moldova, and cross-border projects have suffered long delays. This has created a wide gap between the very generous public declarations of support for Moldova and the actual results. The long-delayed construction of the pipeline to connect the two countries' gas networks is a case in point. This project was launched in 2010 but only completed in 2020. At the same time, despite the physical existence of the gas link between Romania and Moldova, the government in Bucharest failed to help its neighbour during the gas crisis which erupted in October 2021 following the expiry of Moldova's contract with Russia; in fact, Moldova received its first ever gas supplies from non-Russian sources only thanks to the Polish company PGNiG.[125] This was partly due to the aforementioned delays in launching the exploitation of the Black Sea deposits from which Romania plans to export gas to Moldova.

It should be emphasised here that the blame for these delays did not always lie with the Romanian side. Just as often, they resulted from the Moldovan administration's inefficiency or the actions taken by Moldova's ruling political and business circles, which for various reasons (such as links to Russia) were not really interested in implementing projects designed to increase Moldova's energy independence. However Romania provided invaluable assistance to its neighbour in late 2022, when Russia's anti-Moldova energy policy prompted the Transnistria-based Moldovan GRES power plant to first reduce (in October) and then completely stop (in November) electricity supplies to right-bank Moldova, the part of the country that is under the control of its constitutional authorities. At that time, Romania supplied it with electricity, partly at preferential prices.[126]

3. Ukraine: overcoming prejudices and mistrust

Ukraine is Romania's largest neighbour in terms of territory, population and the length of their common border. However, it has never played a significant role in the policy of Romania, which has failed to develop any comprehensive strategy towards it over the last three decades.[127] Romania views Ukraine

[125] K. Całus, 'Moldova: contract with Gazprom threatens the 3rd energy package', OSW, 3 November 2021, osw.waw.pl.

[126] *Idem*, 'Moldova: the spectre of an energy crisis', OSW, 24 October 2022, osw.waw.pl.

[127] One indication of Ukraine's low importance is that Romania's National Defence Strategy only mentions it for the first time in 2015; previously, this country fell under the broader category of the 'Black Sea region'. See *National defense strategy 2015–2019*, Romanian Presidential Administration, per: eda.europa.eu.

mainly through the prism of its resident Romanian minority, various bilateral economic and infrastructural disputes, and above all, security. Despite the marked increase in the dynamic of bilateral relations following the Russian attack in 2014 and the unequivocally pro-Ukrainian stance that the Romanian government took after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of its neighbour in February 2022, Romania remains distrustful of Ukraine. At the same time, old stereotypes and unresolved issues continue to weigh on mutual relations.

One of the topics that has repeatedly caused tensions is the issue of minorities: both Romanians in Ukraine and Ukrainians in Romania. According to data from the 2001 Ukrainian census, approximately 150,000 people of Romanian nationality and 258,000 members of Moldovan nationality lived in Ukraine. Romania recognises the latter as part of the Romanian nation, adds up the numbers of both minorities and reports in its statistics that about 400,000 'Romanians' live in Ukraine. The Ukrainian government makes a distinction between the two groups, which Romania disapproves of, seeing it as a blow to its policy of protecting the rights of the Romanian minority outside its homeland and as an attempt to 'de-Romanise' a part of the Ukraine-based diaspora. In 2008, this attitude prompted Romania to suspend the work of the bilateral Intergovernmental Commission on Minorities, which had been monitoring the territories of both countries with the participation of experts from the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

The problem of the Romanian minority in Ukraine is further exacerbated by the aforementioned restoration of Romanian citizenship to those people (and their descendants) who had lost it as a result of the 1940 border changes. Official figures are not available, but it has been estimated that between 50,000 and 100,000 Ukrainian citizens have so far exercised their right to obtain a Romanian passport. Although Ukraine has not commented on Romania's actions on this issue, it does not see them in a positive light, especially as Ukrainian law prohibits dual citizenship.[128] The local media have portrayed these Romanian actions as an expression of 'imperialist tendencies'.

Romania has reacted harshly to any steps that could restrict the rights of the ethnic Romanians who live in Ukraine. In September 2017, following Ukraine's introduction of an education law that restricted the rights of minorities to learn their mother tongue, President Iohannis announced that he was cancelling

[128] M. Necsutu, 'Rising Demand for Romanian Citizenship May Irritate Ukraine', BalkanInsight, 6 November 2018, balkaninsight.com.

his October visit to Ukraine, and said that it would not take place until the controversy over the new law was cleared up. The then-leader of the ruling bloc, Liviu Dragnea, also expressed disappointment with the new regulations, while the country's foreign ministry announced that it would intervene with the General Secretariat of the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission, as well as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. The parliament in Bucharest also addressed this issue, declaring that without respect for minority rights "it is not possible for Ukraine to make progress on its path to the EU".[129]

Bilateral relations have also been adversely affected by the rhetoric of some Romanian politicians which Ukraine perceives as revisionist. Although both countries confirmed the course of their border in the agreements from 1997 and 2003, these politicians continue to question the legality of the 1940 arrangements on the Romanian-Soviet border, as a result of which Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina (which had belonged to the Kingdom of Romania) as well as Snake Island in the Black Sea, became part of the Soviet Union. Actually, such statements only arise in the context of Bessarabia (the present-day Republic of Moldova) as part of the aforementioned obligatory political narrative that promotes closer ties between Romania and Moldova and their ultimate reunification, but they nevertheless raise understandable concerns in Ukraine, and are seen there as claims on its territory.

Ukrainian concerns about Romanian revisionism are very vivid, as evidenced by the unusual step that the general military prosecutor Anatoly Matios took in June 2019: he convened a meeting of the heads of security services, the armed forces and diplomacy in response to a humorous video that was posted online in May 2019. The author of this amateur film depicted a scenario in which Romania seized northern Bukovina and a part of the Odesa region.[130] It is also worth mentioning the words of President Volodymyr Zelensky, who during the celebration of Ukrainian Unity Day in January 2020 said that 1918 marked the beginning of Romania's occupation of northern Bukovina. The Romanian media widely criticised his remarks, while the country's foreign ministry summoned the Ukrainian ambassador to demand an explanation on this matter.

[129] A. Sadecki, T. Piechal, T. Dąborowski, 'Ukraine: a blow against the national minorities' school system', OSW, 27 September 2017, osw.waw.pl.

[130] 'Матіос скликає силовиків через провокаційне відео захоплення Румунією Буковини', LB.ua, 2 June 2019.

In the economic dimension, one of the most contentious issues that weigh on relations between the two countries is Ukraine's planned expansion of the Danube-Black Sea fairway along the Bystre Canal in the part of the Danube Delta that it controls. This project is designed to increase the competitiveness of Ukrainian ports on the Danube, such as Reni and Izmail, and to facilitate the development of this region. Romania has opposed this project, arguing that it goes against the norms of international law on environmental protection. In parallel, however, it has been expanding its own waterways (the Sulina and Sfântu Gheorghe canals), to which the Ukrainian project poses competition. From the Ukrainian public's point of view, their neighbour opposes Ukrainian plans for the Bystre Canal because it wants to secure a monopoly on the transport of goods along the Danube Delta. In the Black Sea region, the two countries have been engaged in economic competition, employing environmental slogans as a tool in their rivalry to maximise profits from harnessing the shipping potential of the Danube estuary.

Another economic problem is the issue of the iron ore mining and processing complex in Kryvyi Rih in Ukraine. Five then-socialist countries, including Romania, co-financed the construction of the smelter, which began in 1983. Although the facility was almost 90% complete, work was stopped in the early 1990s, which exposed Romania to heavy losses after it had invested an estimated $1 billion in the complex. Since 2021 it has been actively trying to divest its stake in this project, aiming to recoup at least some of its funds and put a stop to any further expenses associated with maintaining the incomplete facility; it costs the Romanian budget around €1 million per year to provide security for this complex.

Until recently, Romania's attitude towards Ukraine was largely shaped by the fact that before the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014, Romania had seen its largest neighbour as a country which was not only strongly connected to Russia, but which even represented its interests in the region. After all, Russia's Black Sea Fleet was stationed in Sevastopol, and Ukraine did not actually become involved in the efforts to solve the Transnistria problem, which was extremely important from the perspective of Romania's security. At that time, Ukraine took steps to integrate with the EU and move closer to NATO, but Romania saw these as lacking in credibility, while Ukraine's policy of balancing between the East and the West together with its tumultuous political crises, such as the Orange Revolution in 2004, further reinforced Romania's distrust of its neighbour. Nonetheless, Romania supported Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration by speaking out in favour of the EU-Ukraine association

agreement and backing its efforts to join NATO when Bucharest hosted the Alliance's summit in 2008.

The outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014 led to a kind of breakthrough, and ushered in a period of warmer mutual relations. Russia's annexation and growing militarisation of Crimea upset the relative strategic balance in the Black Sea, as a result of which Romania's sense of threat from Russia increased sharply. Combined with the unequivocally pro-Western course adopted by the government in Kyiv, this led to a gradual change in Romania's image of Ukraine, which it began to see as a potential partner in its rivalry with Russia. A change of president in Romania also aided this rapprochement: in December 2014, Băsescu was succeeded by Iohannis, who was much less inclined to raise revisionist slogans or highlight the issue of the Romanian minority in Ukraine.

The warmer relations paved the way for the two countries to sign an agreement on local border traffic in 2014, and resulted in a significant increase in the dynamic of political relations. On 21 April 2016, Petro Poroshenko became the first Ukrainian leader in almost eight years to pay an official visit to Bucharest. Several Romanian-Ukrainian bodies resumed their work, including the presidential commission on cooperation, the intergovernmental commission on national minorities, and the commission on military affairs; the work of this latter body had been suspended for the previous decade. In May 2016, Romania decided to abolish its fees for issuing long-term national visas for Ukrainian citizens.[131] At the same time, the two countries clearly began to move towards closer defence cooperation: they signed several agreements in this field, including on the joint protection of classified information and joint patrols of their border. Following the NATO summit in Wales, Romania became the coordinator of NATO's fund to strengthen Ukraine's cyber security, while the Romanian state-owned company Rasirom provided cybersecurity support to some of Ukraine's state institutions. Following the summit, Romania also offered Ukraine symbolic assistance in the form of €250,000 worth of military equipment.

4. Many pledges, little substance: Romania and the war in Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine sparked serious concern in Bucharest, prompting both the government and the opposition parties in Romania to jointly express their firm opposition. President Iohannis called Russia's

[131] 'Румунія скасувала плату за візи для українців', LB.ua, 6 May 2016.

actions "a grave violation of international law" and declared that they would be met with "the strongest response from the international community, which will entail wide-ranging consequences and serious costs" [for Russia – author's note]. The government also expressed its unequivocal support for imposing the toughest possible economic sanctions on the invader. In early April 2022, Romania expelled 10 Russian diplomats from its territory; one more employee of the Russian embassy was declared *persona non grata* in August. On 26 April 2022, Prime Minister Ciucă visited Kyiv together with Marcel Ciolacu, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and the leader of the co-ruling PSD, and foreign minister Bogdan Aurescu. Iohannis only came to the Ukrainian capital on 16 June, joining the French president, the German chancellor and the Italian prime minister who were on a visit to Kyiv. He expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian government, called for Russia to be held accountable for its crimes in Ukraine, and said that Romania would help its neighbour identify the measures needed to confront the threat from the Kremlin.

Romania has also strongly supported the successive packages of sanctions that the EU imposed on Russia and called for severing existing economic ties with it, including in the areas of trade and energy. In the early days of the war, the Romanian government started the procedure to exit the Budapest-based International Investment Bank, in which the Romanian Treasury holds about 7% of shares, as well as the Moscow-registered International Bank for Economic Cooperation, both of which were established back in Soviet times and are still dominated by Russia. At the same time, the Romanian state has become involved in providing humanitarian support to Ukraine. Since early March, an EU logistics centre to distribute and coordinate aid to this country has been operating near Suceava; however, aid from Romania accounts for a very small proportion of the goods that have been sent to Kyiv through this centre. Romania has also been sending its neighbour regular shipments with relief supplies for the most needy. 80,000 migrants have found refuge on Romanian territory; they have received free public transport, medical assistance, access to education, as well as assistance in finding legal employment.

According to the interior ministry, its subordinate institutions have spent around €60 million on 'services provided to refugees' from the start of the conflict until the end of August. In parallel, Romania has been providing material and humanitarian assistance to Moldova, which has been struggling to cope with a significant influx of refugees: back in October 2022, there were already as many of them in Moldova as in the whole of Romania. The Romanian government has also organised the so-called 'green corridors' to make

it easier for refugees to move from the Moldovan-Ukrainian border deeper into the country. Moreover, it has also been involved in efforts to facilitate the export of Ukrainian grain via Constanța, which is connected to Ukraine's Danube ports of Reni, Ismail and Kilia via the Danube-Black Sea canal. According to the European Commission, in the second half of 2022 Romania (mainly the Danube route) accounted for around 50% of EU-handled exports of food and agricultural products from Ukraine. The Romanian government has also implemented infrastructural projects worth tens of millions of euros to accommodate more Ukrainian goods.

Despite Romania's unequivocally pro-Ukrainian stance and its awareness of the dangers arising from the Russian invasion, its approach to the ongoing war should be described as cautious. Its strong political support for the government in Kyiv and its humanitarian efforts stand in contrast to the small scale of official military aid: in October 2022, the Kiel Institute for the World Economy estimated it at around €3 million.[132] According to available data, Romania has so far sent only small shipments of fuel, vests, helmets and ammunition to Ukraine, which falls far short of the support that other regional countries have provided to Ukraine, with the exception of Hungary. Only in late April 2022 did the Romanian government adopt measures that allowed it to supply its allies and partner countries with weapons from its military reserves. Thanks to this, Ukraine has probably received 28 T-72 tanks from the Romanian army, five of which are fully operational. In August 2022, Ukraine's defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov reported that Romania had provided Ukraine with five support packages which contained items such as small arms, ammunition and spare parts.[133] However, the government in Bucharest has never officially confirmed this report. Other signs of Romania's restraint included its decision not to sign a letter published on 28 February 2022 by eight countries on NATO's eastern flank which called for Ukraine to be granted EU candidate status as soon as possible (Romania presumably wanted this letter to include Moldova), as well as President Iohannis's relatively late visit to Kyiv compared to the other regional leaders: it did not take place until 16 June.

Romania has repeatedly suggested that the size of its real military assistance to Ukraine is much greater, but cannot be disclosed for security reasons. It appears that the government is keen to avoid a situation where Russia could

[132] 'Ukraine Support Tracker. A Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine', Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 6 July 2023, ifw-kiel.de.

[133] Е. Соколенко, 'Румыния передала ВСУ новый пакет военной помощи', УНІАН, 25 August 2022, unian.net.

interpret its moves as direct involvement in the ongoing conflict. Therefore, Romanian officials have not only declined to make any comments on possible arms deliveries to Ukraine, but have also refused to confirm whether Romanian territory is being used for such shipments from other NATO countries. They have probably chosen this approach for two reasons of equal importance: a genuine fear of a Russian reaction, and a desire to conceal the scale of the country's military support to Ukraine, which is actually quite limited. Romania's reticence to supply weapons probably stems in particular from its reluctance to provide assistance at the expense of its own arms potential. Romania has relatively scarce stocks of weaponry and equipment that it could transfer without compromising its own defence capabilities (it appears that the weapons it has supplied to Ukraine have mainly been withdrawn from the army's inventory). There are also concerns that Russia could perceive such transfers as a provocation and this could create a threat to the security of Moldova, on whose territory Russian troops are stationed (in separatist Transnistria). Other possible reasons for this attitude include Romania's aforementioned distrustful attitude towards Ukraine, as well as the views of the Romanian electorate, a large part of which is reluctant to provide equipment assistance to Ukraine.

The Romanian elite is worried that the potential success of the Russian offensive could lead to a significant deterioration of Romania's strategic situation. In the worst-case scenario, Russian troops could arrive on the Romanian border; just as importantly, the Republic of Moldova's security and even sovereignty would come under threat. In the event of a successful landing in Odesa, the Russian armed forces could enter Transnistria and force the Moldovan leaders to reintegrate the country by implementing the federalisation model that Russia favours, something they have consistently resisted for more than two decades. Moldova would be demilitarised while Transnistria, a pro-Russian territory infiltrated by Russian secret services, would be given the right to veto foreign policy decisions taken in Chișinău. Russia would also be able to maintain its 'peacekeeping forces' on the federation's territory. Such a development would torpedo Romania's plans for Moldova's European integration. And lead to a drastic shift or even a freeze in Romanian-Moldovan relations.

Despite being aware of such a threat, Romania has not taken any significant steps to boost Moldova's defence capabilities. On the contrary, Romanian officials have openly admitted on several occasions that in the event of a Russian attack this country (which they see as unlikely), they would not be able to come to its aid due to Romania's commitments as a member of NATO. However, Romania has been trying to make up for its passivity in bolstering Moldova's

security by providing it with extensive political and material support, including financial assistance. To explain this attitude Romania has said that it does not want to provoke the Kremlin, and that Moldova, which wishes to remain neutral, is not interested in obtaining military assistance. For example, during a visit to Moldova in early June 2022 Marcel Ciolacu, the head of Romania's co-ruling PSD and Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, said that Moldova did not need arms supplies at that time. Instead, Romania has focused on providing Moldova with significant political support and helping it to increase its independence from Russia, especially in terms of energy supplies. Romanian officials, including President Iohannis, Prime Minister Ciucă and Speaker Ciolacu, have visited Chișinău regularly. On 18 June 2022, the Moldovan capital hosted a joint meeting of the two countries' parliaments, which was attended by more than 60 Romanian MPs. Romania has also provided Moldova with access to a part of the capacity of its underground gas storage facilities, which are currently holding several tens of millions of cubic metres of gas that Moldova has purchased.

5. Poland: shared experiences, concerns and interests

Relations between Romania and Poland have traditionally been seen as very good. The two countries are linked by years of cooperation in the inter-war period, as mentioned in the historical part of this paper, and also share a very similar perception of the international situation and threats to the region: for many years, both have consistently considered Russia to be the most serious challenge to the security of Central and Eastern Europe. Romania and Poland are geared towards very close cooperation with the United States, and see it as a pillar of stability that is essential for the region's defence capabilities. They also often share similar interests within the EU on issues such as transport, the EU's budget (development funds, agricultural subsidies) and support for the enlargement process in the Western Balkans. Romania has also struck various situational coalitions with Poland in the V4+ format over the years. On the symbolic level, the most recent expression of these excellent bilateral relations came in March 2023 when the parliaments of both countries decided to establish 3 March as Polish-Romanian Solidarity Day.

Poland and Romania have not only cooperated within NATO, but since 2017 they have each maintained a company of troops on each other's territory as part of the NATO battlegroups. For more than a decade, they have also been holding a so-called strategic dialogue, and in 2015 they launched the B9, which has helped to harmonise the positions of the countries on the eastern flank

and to advance the region's interests within NATO more effectively. Since 2012, they have been cooperating with Turkey under the so-called trialogue, which has been held at the foreign-minister level since 2016.

Romania's involvement in this format allows its government to pursue several important objectives. Firstly, this initiative helps to coordinate actions and strengthen ties between the three largest and most powerful countries on NATO's eastern flank. Romania wants to strengthen and consolidate the initiative, treating it as a priority of its security policy. It is crucial here that Turkey has the greatest military capabilities among NATO's members in this part of Europe, and is the main force capable of constraining Russia's influence in and around the Black Sea, a strategic area for Romania. In this context, the trialogue complements the broader B9 format, which does not include Turkey. Coordinating the actions of the countries on the eastern flank is now particularly important in view of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As part of the trialogue, Romania has sought to cooperate with Turkey on issues such as the neutralisation of mines drifting in the Black Sea shipping lanes and the export of grain from Ukrainian ports. Secondly, by deepening defence ties with Poland and Turkey, Romania aims to strengthen its position in NATO as a reliable US ally that actively contributes to the stability and security of the Black Sea region. Thirdly, Romania sees the trialogue as a tool that allows it to act as an intermediary and authority to mitigate disputes between Turkey and some other NATO members, especially the United States. Fourthly, it has used this initiative to support and promote the idea of 'open doors' to NATO among the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries, which forms part of Romanian foreign policy. For example, this was demonstrated by the invitation of the Ukrainian and Georgian heads of diplomacy to attend the meeting of foreign ministers under the trialogue format in Bucharest in April 2021.

Romania is also an active member of the 3SI, which both the presidential office and the leaders of the governing coalition have endorsed, and it is keen to highlight the synergies between the 3SI and B9. From the perspective of Romanian policymakers, who usually seek to 'securitise' the existing formats of cooperation, the 3SI has the potential to enhance security in the region, in addition to its economic and infrastructural dimensions. For example, the Via Carpatia, the 3SI's flagship project, is seen in Romania as a route to increasing military mobility on the eastern flank, which is in keeping with the European mobility package and the concept of the so-called military Schengen. It is worth noting that Romania will again host the Three Seas Summit in 2023, five years after the event first took place there in 2018.

Both Poland and Romania support the European aspirations of the Western Balkan countries, Moldova and Ukraine. Both countries have also spoken out in favour of Ukraine's accession to NATO. Romania has officially welcomed Poland's political interest in and support for Moldova. At the same time it seems to view Poland's activity in this country with some unease, treating it as a kind of competition to its own efforts. Indeed, it seeks to maintain its image as Moldova's main advocate in the EU and a key representative of its interests in the West. These efforts are also important in the context of domestic politics, as Romanian parties are eager to portray themselves as effective defenders of the 'Bessarabian Romanians'[134] when they vie for support both among voters at home and the approximately 1 million Moldovans who hold Romanian passports. This attitude may have been one of the main reasons for the failure of the joint 'Chișinău format' that was launched during a meeting of the presidents of Poland, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine in Chișinău in August 2021. Just over a year later, in September 2022 (at Romania's initiative), the last three of these countries set up a trilateral format focused on the security issues, including energy security, of the region's countries.[135]

[134] That is, the Moldovans.

[135] 'Україна, Молдова й Румунія запускають новий тристоронній формат взаємодії', Європейська правда, 15 September 2022, eurointegration.com.ua.

VII. RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA: THE UNRESOLVED PAST AND THE CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Romanian-Russian relations since 1991 can be described as cool and tense, and occasionally even openly hostile. This partly stems from their difficult past and the historical grievances that are yet to be resolved, such as the issue of the return of the Romanian national treasure that was seized by the Soviet Union. Other important factors include Romania's unequivocally pro-Western orientation, which is reflected in its active participation in NATO and close military cooperation with the US, as well as its political interests in the Republic of Moldova and in the Black Sea region, which are completely opposed to those of Russia.

Romanian political elites almost unanimously recognise Russia as the primary threat to the country's security and position in the Black Sea region. Moldova is the main area of rivalry with Russia. Romania has been strongly promoting the idea of unity between the Romanian and Moldovan peoples, but this has met with strong resistance from the Kremlin, which has openly pushed Moldova to cooperate with the EEU, supported pro-Russian factions, and promoted a Moldovan national identity that is independent of the Romanian one. Russia is also the main sponsor and defender of the separatist and internationally unrecognised Transnistria; Romania has been calling for its liquidation through its unconditional incorporation into Moldova, while Russia would like to see them merge into a federation. Romania has also supported Ukraine in its defence against the Russian onslaught and backed its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Fearful of Russia's growing influence in the region, Romania has consistently been one of Europe's main critics of Russian actions in Ukraine and a proponent of a stronger NATO presence in the Black Sea basin. Since 2005, it has also been effectively developing cooperation with the US, hosting both US army troops and elements of the US anti-missile system at the Deveselu base since 2014. This strategy, which Russia has strongly condemned, has had a negative impact on Romanian-Russian relations. As a result, even before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, Russia came to see Romania as an unfriendly and even hostile country.[136]

[136] The head of the European department at the Russian foreign ministry, Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko, made this clear in 2017. He claimed that Romania had been pursuing a Russophobic policy and had become a threat to Russia after elements of the US missile shield were installed on its territory. See A. Федякина, 'МИД РФ: Румыния стала угрозой для России', Российская Газета, 9 February 2017, rg.ru.

In addition to the fundamentally contradictory visions of the future international order in the region, Romania's relations with Russia are burdened by historical legacies. In the minds of the Romanian political elite and the public, Russia not only imposed the Communist system on Romania after World War II, but also forcibly annexed Romania's Bessarabia and northern Bukovina in 1940. Another difficult topic concerns the Romanian national treasure. During World War I, when the Central Powers occupied Bucharest, the government evacuated to Iași and decided to send to Moscow some 94 tonnes of gold as well as works of art, jewellery and manuscripts that were invaluable to Romanian history. In 1918, after Romanian troops entered Bessarabia, which was then formally part of Russia, the new Soviet government in Moscow officially confiscated this national treasure. Since then, Romania has been trying to regain its property, but with limited success. Although Russia has returned a part of the treasure (in three shipments, which were organised in 1935, 1956 and 2008), the vast majority of it is still on Russian territory. The bilateral commission that was set up in 2003 to resolve this issue has met very rarely (its last meeting in November 2019 was the first after more than three years of inactivity)[137] and has so far failed to achieve any tangible results.

The low intensity of bilateral visits testifies to the poor state of relations between the two countries. A Romanian president last visited Moscow back in 2005, while a Russian head of state has only visited Bucharest once, on the occasion of the Russia-NATO summit in 2008. The situation looks similar at the head of government level: Adrian Năstase was the last Romanian prime minister to visit Moscow in 2004, a year after Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov made a trip the Romanian capital. No visits by delegations headed by foreign ministers have taken place since 2013. At the same time, both sides have regularly made diplomatic slights against the other. For example, in July 2017 Romania denied overflight permission to a plane that was carrying Russian deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin, who was heading to Chișinău for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the 'peace operation in Transnistria'; it was necessary for him to fly along this route because Ukraine had closed its airspace to Russian aircraft.[138]

Political relations are correlated with Russia's low economic importance for Romania. Even before 24 February 2022 the Russian Federation accounted

[137] 'România și Rusia discută din nou despre Tezaurul românesc aflat la Moscova din Primul Război Mondial', Digi24, 9 November 2019, digi24.ro.

[138] P. Maftei, 'Rogozin amenință România: „Așteptați răspuns, nemernicilor!"', Deschide.md, 28 July 2017.

for only 1.6% of Romania's exports and 3.8% of its imports; fuel made up as much as 80% of imported Russian goods (according to data for 2018). However, unlike most countries in the region, Romania is not dependent on energy imports from Russia to any significant degree. It meets 80–90% of its gas needs on its own and imports 70% of its oil, primarily from Kazakhstan. At present, economic exchange with Russia plays a marginal role.

VIII. SUMMARY: THE DILEMMAS AND CHALLENGES OF ROMANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

In view of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, Romania will focus even more than before on enhancing its own security in the coming years. It will step up its efforts to strengthen Romanian-US relations (including through purchases of US weapons), improve its position in NATO, and consolidate the Alliance's eastern flank. To this end, the government will strive to raise the profile of regional formats such as B9 and the Poland-Romania-Turkey trialogue. It will also support the projects it sees as conducive to military mobility and energy security, including those carried out within the framework of the Three Seas Initiative and energy projects linking the EU (via Romania) with energy exporters such as Azerbaijan.[139] At the same time, while supporting the planned reconstruction of Ukraine and its closer ties with Western structures, Romania intends to continue acting as an advocate for the Republic of Moldova and striving to ensure that it receives the necessary economic and political support from Western partners, as it wants the European integration of Ukraine and Moldova to be treated as a 'package deal'.

One of Romania's most difficult challenges is the recurrent and growing tensions between the United States and some EU countries. Romanian decision-makers are likely to maintain their cross-party consensus on the need to preserve the strategic partnership with the US while strengthening the country's European ties and cooperation with the largest Western countries in Europe. Elements of this policy include deeper military cooperation and purchases of military equipment from both the US and the country's European partners, mainly German and French arms companies. At the same time, it should be noted that Romanian tenders for the supply of weapons have repeatedly generated serious difficulties, which often bring about their collapse or give rise to disputes.[140] As part of its policy of Euro-Atlantic balancing, Romania

[139] K. Całus, 'Rumunia: umowa z azerskim SOCAR-em na dostawy gazu', OSW, 23 December 2022, osw.waw.pl.

[140] During a visit by French President François Hollande in 2016, Airbus opened a new plant near Brasov to produce H215 multi-role helicopters. A year later, Romania expressed its desire to acquire 15 or 16 such aircraft. However, it ultimately failed to deliver on this pledge for another two years, which led to tensions between Romania and France. In October 2019, Airbus declared that it would suspend the operations at its Romanian factory and consider relocating production to another country. In response, the Romanian government promptly concluded an agreement on cooperation and support for the company. The programme to build new ships for the Romanian navy and deliver new amphibious wheeled armoured personnel carriers for the Romanian army has also been plagued by problems. Cooperation with the US has been better, especially in recent years, but even here problems have occasionally arisen. In 2017, Romania signed a letter of intent with the US company Bell Helicopter to purchase a total of 45 combat and transport helicopters, which ultimately did not

has also been extensively involved in EU defence formats. For example, in 2017 it agreed to affiliate the 81st General Grigore Balan Mechanised Brigade to a German rapid reaction division; it has also actively participated in projects that have been implemented as part of the Permanent Structured Cooperation mechanism (PESCO). However, it is worth noting that during periods of tensions between Washington and Brussels, Romania has usually given priority to US interests.

The growing discord between Western countries and Turkey, which has been particularly evident since 24 February 2022, is another problem for Romania, which is keen to see a stronger US presence in the region and increased NATO activity in the Black Sea basin. This situation, combined with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, has heightened Romania's sense of insecurity and created a threat to the Westernisation of the Black Sea basin which it has been promoting.

There will be no reunification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova in the foreseeable future. As mentioned earlier, for a significant part of the Romanian political class, the pro-union narrative is largely propaganda aimed at the domestic audience.[141] In reality, the mainstream parties are afraid of the economic, political and social costs of such a move, which is why the vast majority of them are not interested in an actual merger of the two countries. According to a 2017 estimate from Romania's Black Sea University Foundation (FUMN), it would cost Romania around $90 billion over 20–25 years[142] to raise the living standards of the Moldovan people to two-thirds of those that the Romanian population enjoys; that comes out to about $3.6–4.5 billion per year, which is equivalent to 5–7% of the state budget's current revenues. Another problem would be the social and political instability in the newly formed republic resulting from increased tensions between ethnic minorities in both of its parts. After the incorporation of Moldova together with the Gagauz Autonomy, Romania's Hungarians could demand a separate status for themselves and call for the creation of a Székely Autonomy.

come to pass. However, the 2017 contract for the delivery of the US-made Patriot anti-missile system and the 2018 contract for the acquisition of the HIMARS missile system were implemented without any major obstacles.

141 AUR, one of whose main political goals is to unite the two countries, appears to be an exception. Its aspirations are profoundly ideological and not merely designed for the purposes of electoral competition.

142 'Cât costă UNIREA Republicii Moldova cu România', Ziarul Național, 1 November 2017, ziarulnational.md.

Any push for Moldova's reunification with Romania would likely face opposition from most international actors, including the EU itself, which sees this project as a risk to its own security and stability. Ukraine could also react negatively out of concern that regaining Moldova would lay the ground for more Romanian territorial claims, including to northern Bukovina and the Budjak which belong to Ukraine. Russia would certainly oppose such a reunification as well, regardless of whether Transnistria would also be annexed to Romania, because it would change the strategic situation in the region due to the disappearance of neutral Moldova from the map and the *de facto* shift of NATO's borders to the east. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict does not favour a possible merger either. Since the outbreak of this war, many of those in Romania who used to support the incorporation of Moldova have taken a more cautious stance on this issue. They seem to assume that in the current situation, the priority is to ensure the security of their own homeland, rather than to integrate with a neighbour they perceive as unstable and highly susceptible to Russian influence. Their concerns have been reflected in polls: in May 2023, only 31% of the population was in favour of reunification (on previous occasions the figure had reached 60–70%), while more than 50% opposed the idea.

Taking all these problems into account, the Romanian political class has not taken any real steps towards the reunification of both countries, and instead has pursued a policy of integration with Moldova based on the convergence process. Romania wants to deepen its economic, political, military and cultural cooperation with Moldova as much as possible. It also hopes that its neighbour's progress in European integration will lead to the elimination of more barriers, the synchronisation of trade and business standards and finally, the removal of restrictions on cross-border traffic. The best-case scenario for the Romanian government is the integration of a friendly and closely linked Moldova into the EU.

In the coming years, we should expect the trends seen in Romanian foreign policy so far to continue. This means that it will remain cautious, lack any ambitious visions that could lead to conflicts between Romania and the EU's main members or the US, and continue to be largely reactive. This situation could change if radical anti-EU parties such as AUR come to power. At present this seems unlikely, but the popularity of this party is still rising (in June 2023 it polled at around 20–25%, compared to the 9% of the vote it received in the 2020 elections); sceptical views towards EU integration could become more widespread in the public debate as a consequence. Therefore, we can expect

the narrative of the mainstream parties, primarily the PSD and the PNL, to shift somewhat towards themes such as nationalism, dignity and sovereignty. This shift is likely to be largely (if not entirely) rhetorical, and will not affect Romania's actual policy towards its main partners.

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