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## ROMANIA: LARGELY IMMUNE TO RUSSIAN PRESSURES

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Romania's keen interest in developments in Europe's east long predates the eruption of the crisis in Ukraine. In 2004, together with Germany, it launched the Black Sea Synergy, a strategy meant to bring that region closer to the EU and to develop intra-regional ties.<sup>73</sup> In 2009, this was replaced by the Eastern Partnership as the EU's official strategy toward the region. Despite being disappointed to see its own earlier initiative overtaken, Romania continued to support EU actions and initiatives in the region. It also backed NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine at the alliance's Bucharest summit in 2008, and has constantly pushed for closer cooperation between these countries and the EU.

### Romania and Ukraine

Romania and Ukraine have kept good neighborly relations despite the territorial dispute they inherited after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For 18 years, the two countries disputed the Serpent Island, a rock in the Black Sea, and the shelf adjacent to it. The dispute was solved in 2009 at the International Court of Justice.<sup>74</sup> Another, ongoing, source of tension has been the treatment of the ethnic Romanian minority in Ukraine. According to Romanian official sources, there are around 400,000 Ukrainians of Romanian origins — a group that the authorities in Kyiv divide into Romanians (150,000) and Moldovans (258,600).<sup>75</sup> Throughout the 20 years of Ukrainian independent statehood, the Romanian minority, as well as other ones, has lacked collective rights such as access to education, information and media in its mother tongue, and political representation at regional and national levels. In order to protect a national

identity still being developed in the new state and at a constant risk of being suffocated by Russia, the Ukrainian authorities have at times taken measures at the expense of minorities. This has given rise to tensions between Romania and Ukraine, which successive governments in both countries have managed to keep at a level that did not prevent a constructive and cooperative relationship from operating.

Located on the Eastern border of the European Union, Romania has a direct interest in a stable and secure EU neighborhood, and it regards the advancement of European norms, values, and, eventually, institutions there as a guarantee of its long-term stability, as outlined in the Black Sea Synergy. It was, therefore, very disappointed by then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's decision to reject the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013. Not only did Romania see this as going against its interest in a Black Sea region that is stable and shares European values, but many there also feared it could affect the European trajectory of Moldova, Romania's sister country, which the EU used to address together with Ukraine in the hope that the latter would benefit the former's quicker progress toward an Association Agreement.

Despite their disappointment with Yanukovych's decision, leaders in Bucharest initially kept a distance from the protests in Ukraine, and they abstained from appearing on EuroMaidan or flagging their support to the pro-European protesters. Romania did, however, react promptly to the forcible repression of protesters, condemning the actions taken against the Ukrainian people by their leaders. In this context, Romania reiterated its support for the European future of Ukraine. After Yanukovych was ousted and a new government installed in Kyiv, it responded promptly and vocally to all consequent events. It condemned Russia's

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<sup>73</sup> European External Action Service, Black Sea Synergy.

<sup>74</sup> International Court of Justice, Maritime Delimitation in the Black Sea (Romania v. Ukraine), press release 2009/9, March 2, 2009.

<sup>75</sup> Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Comunitatea românească din Ucraina, opened on December 11, 2014.

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annexation of Crimea and, repeatedly, Russia's waging and fuelling war in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>76</sup>

Romania continues to pay close attention to the treatment of minorities in Ukraine, while remaining a consistent supporter of the country's territorial integrity. It is very sensitive to the issue of Romanian minorities in neighboring countries, and to the issue of ethnic minorities in general, as it is not itself a stranger to ethnic tensions. Romania also always firmly condemns any act of separatism and has done so regarding Eastern Ukraine as it has its own concerns about separatist threats. This constant preoccupation, dictated by the domestic and regional contexts, did not impede the development of good relations with the post-Yanukovich government. Since February 2014, Romanian leaders have met with their new Ukrainian counterparts several times, seeking to further develop bilateral relations and to assist Ukraine in its current transition.<sup>77</sup>

#### Romania as an EU and NATO Member

Having initially condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea and its destabilizing actions in Eastern Ukraine, Romania continues to be vocal in its condemnation of Russia's actions in the region.<sup>78</sup> It fully implements all sanctions imposed by the EU against Russian individuals and companies. Not only did Romania approve of the sanctions since they were first imposed in March 2014, it has also, alongside Poland and the United Kingdom, asked for their toughening at the EU summits in July and August 2014.

Together with Poland and the Baltic countries, Romania has also asked for increased security measures in the region, and it has fully supported

<sup>76</sup> President of Romania, press statement, March 16, 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Official position of Romania on Ukraine.

<sup>78</sup> President of Romania, press statement, May 13, 2014.

and taken part in NATO operations in the region and in the Black Sea. Its air force has conducted joint exercises with the U.S. military, and assisted NATO in its air-policing efforts. The port of Constanta hosted the *USS Truxtun* and *USS Donald Cook* during their missions in the Black Sea.<sup>79</sup> As a faithful partner of the United States and an active member of NATO, Romania agreed to host elements of the NATO anti-ballistic missile shield that Russia fiercely opposes. This decision has further strained the relation between those two countries.

#### Romania and Russia

Romania's reaction to Ukraine crisis is not surprising. A constant supporter of the region's rapprochement with Europe, it also has a little more leverage in its relations with Russia than other new members of the EU.

Although it continues to import some gas from Russia, Romania has other resources that cover most of its consumption. Its imports of gas from Russia in 2013 amounted to 10 percent of consumption, down from 25 percent in 2012.<sup>80</sup> According to the Ministry of Energy, Romania has enough reserves to go through this winter without any imports from Russia, should the latter decide to cut off supply in retaliation for its position in the Ukraine crisis.<sup>81</sup> In addition to its current gas reserves, Romania has also recently discovered important new ones on the shelf of the Black Sea, some of them already under exploration. According to officials and initial estimates, these new reserves will allow the country not only to be fully energy-independent by 2019, but also to

<sup>79</sup> Carl Osgood, NATO Deploys Ever Closer to Russia, *Executive Intelligence Review*, April 11, 2014.

<sup>80</sup> România poate importa acum gaz din Austria, la același preț cu cel luat de la Gazprom, *Economica.net*, August 19, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Romanian Ministry of Energy, press release, July 16, 2014.

become a net exporter by the same date.<sup>82</sup> Romania already exports gas to Moldova, alleviating the latter's dependency on Russia, and is planning interconnectors with Bulgaria and Hungary. Its low dependence on Russian gas makes it less constrained than some other countries in the region in taking firm positions on Russia's actions.

Relations between Romania and Russia have been rather sinuous for the past 200 years. In 1816, Romania lost Bessarabia to Russia after the latter won the Russian-Turkish War, and the region then went back and forth between the two countries until 1944, when it became part of the USSR. Most of Bessarabia is now within Moldova, which has close, antagonistic ties to both Romania, which supports Moldova's integration in the EU, and to Russia, which opposes it. The attempted secession of Transnistria from Moldova in 1992, after a war in which Russia supported the separatists with troops and weaponry, further complicated the situation. Russian troops have been stationed in Transnistria ever since, despite Moscow having signed the Istanbul Accord that stipulates their withdrawal.<sup>83</sup> For the past 22 years, Romania, alongside other European countries, has condemned Russia for its continued support of the Transnistrian separatists and its military presence there.

Romania's relations with Russia are also affected by another historical legacy, as Russia has long refused to return 93.5 tons of gold that Romania evacuated there in 1916 when faced with invasion by Germany.

Since its language, unlike the other ones in Eastern Europe, is a Latin language, Romania is

traditionally closer in culture to European countries of Latin origin than to Russia. Today, as during the communist era, Romanians enjoy a high degree of immunity to Russian propaganda because they do not understand the Russian-speaking media. There is hence little affinity with Russia within Romanian society. Instead, the complicated historical relationship and the country's non-Slavic origins have contributed to a general distrust of Russia, which has been constant throughout the last century. A recent survey of Romanian sentiment toward other countries places Russia as the least-liked one, with only 37 percent expressing a positive feeling toward it.<sup>84</sup>

#### Russia's Reaction to Romania's Position in the Ukraine Crisis

In recent months, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has criticized the "anti-Russian" attitude of Romania's leadership. After the election of Romania's new president, Klaus Johannis, in November 2014, a Russian statement expressed hope that he would not adopt the attitude of his predecessor, Traian Băsescu, but instead put relations between the two countries back on a friendlier track.<sup>85</sup>

Romania is not seriously concerned about losing access to the Russian market for its goods, as economic relations between the two countries plummeted in the 1990s. Trade with Russia account for only 3.4 percent of Romania's overall economic exchanges;<sup>86</sup> the EU is Romania's main trading partner with over 70 percent. The authorities are increasingly wary, however, of the infiltration of Russian capital in the economy and the risk of

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<sup>82</sup> Romania's proven reserves are estimated at 100 billion cubic meters, and Romania consumes 12.4 bcm/year. New reserves in the Black Sea are currently estimated at 42-84 bcm, although their exploration has not been finalized.

<sup>83</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Istanbul Document 1999.

<sup>84</sup> Sondaj INSCOP: Ce țară simpatizează și antipatizează România. Germania și Rusia, la extreme, INSCOP, July 30, 2014.

<sup>85</sup> МИД РФ ждет от нового президента Румынии «перелома» в отношениях с Россией, *Regnum*, November 21, 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Embassy of Russian Federation to Romania, Relațiile comerciale și economice ruso-române.

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destabilization this may pose in some sectors. Official figures list Russia as an unimportant foreign investor, with total investments officially under \$100 million. However, Russian capital also enters the economy through third countries or from offshore locations. Romania's main foreign investors are the Netherlands and Austria, two of the countries most transited by Russian capital.<sup>87</sup> For example, Lukoil's presence in Romania — beginning in 1998, when it purchased the Petrotel refinery — is not officially listed as a Russian investment, but as a Dutch one, having been registered by its subsidiary in the Netherlands. Purchases in the early 1990s by Russian groups, with third country capital, of three of Romania's main steel plants and their subsequent bankruptcy due to poor management have raised suspicions about the intentions of Russian investors.

Russian propaganda is also finding its way into Romania. Since March 2014, the Russian media intensified their spinning of news about Romanian leaders and events in the country through Voice of Russia radio, which broadcasts in Romanian. In late 2014, a new Romanian-language news website, RussiaToday.ro, an offshoot of RT, was launched. Despite Russia's efforts to influence public opinion and decision-makers in Romania, there is no major division of attitudes toward it, and no major tension between the politics and the economics

<sup>87</sup> Romanian National Bank, Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Romania.

of the relationship. Some intellectuals pursue a pro-Russian discourse, but they are rare exceptions. In general, Romania's society and politicians have reacted in the same way to events in Ukraine and to Russia's actions, and are wary of potential Russian moves in Southern Bessarabia (Bugeac), that would bring Russia closer Romania's border.<sup>88</sup>

Romania is well aware that its stance on the situation in Ukraine and on Russia's actions in the region makes it a target for Russian retaliation. Officials are not as much concerned about a military attack from Russia, which is considered a possibility albeit unlikely, as they are about its potential actions to destabilize the region through Transnistria and to weaken the economy. Yet lack of economic dependence on Russia and of divisive opinions on Russia within society gives Romania good leverage in its relation with it, and allows for a firm attitude against its aggression. Romania's successful transition from an autocratic regime to a democracy and its current successes in the fight against corruption make it a valuable partner for Ukraine in its current developments, a relationship both countries seem interested to pursue, and one that the EU should promote further.

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<sup>88</sup> Russia threatens Moldova over its EU relations, *Euractiv*, September 3, 2014.