

LONG TERM STRATEGIES FOR ROMANIA: WHERE ARE WE HEADING TO?

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Abstract

In the last decade, Romania has faced new and challenging experiences, going through a period of change with a broad social, economic and political impact: the accession to NATO and to the EU and the need to adapt to European and Euro-Atlantic values. This complex process requires firstly a look back in order to observe the achievements, but also the failures, followed by a prospective look, the main directions of analysis being represented by the answer to some questions like: How has the Romania's position within NATO and EU been shaped and structured? What was its role in the critical moments?

The substance of these questions must be kept, but the orientation has to be directed toward the future. In addition, we believe that it is paramount for Romania to capitalize on EU and NATO membership by establishing a comprehensive set of priorities in the relations with Moldova, Ukraine and the Western Balkans, as well as a coherent strategy regarding the Black Sea. These priorities should be directed toward supporting the European aspirations of Moldova by transferring experience from Romania to Moldova in social, political, economic and security issues, relaunching the bilateral relationship with Ukraine to mitigate the Russian influence in the region and to avoid having a border with Russia, strengthening the bilateral and multilateral cooperation in Western Balkans to launch projects for development and regional stability, creating a Romania's identity as an active player in the Black Sea region, focusing on energy, security and fight against organized crime.

Keywords

Neighbourhood, Romania, stability, strategic vision

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, Romania's evolution in the international community was enlivened by the integration projects, the relationship with the neighbouring countries being redefined through European and Euro-Atlantic principles. Once Romania became part of NATO and the EU, the need for a new strategic vision arose naturally. Thus, by joining the NATO and the EU, our country has become an important strategic actor in terms of its position at the confluence of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian space. Moreover, Romania should take advantage of its status as *jumping-off place* of the Western interests in the Black Sea, Caucasus and Asia and as coagulator of the integrating aspirations of the states located in the Balkan Peninsula and Eastern Europe and it should be an active player in the current regional transformations (Moştofleu 2004, 13).

To be effective, this new strategic approach must be based on principles such as: the rule of law, democracy and human rights, the principle of cooperation, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state or the international principles of conflict resolution and the alignment with European and Euro-Atlantic objectives. With the existence of so many issues, in this paper we have tried to outline a long-term strategic vision oriented toward the enhancing the potential role of Romania in its Eastern neighbourhood, focusing on Moldova, Ukraine, the Western Balkans, and the Black Sea region. Also, we have identified several priorities and we have drawn some directions for action. Firstly, regarding the relationship with Moldova, we consider it a priority for Romania to increase its efforts in becoming the interface between Moldova and the European Union and to support it in joining the EU, all of this coupled with an effective management of aid funds. Secondly, as a member of NATO and of the EU, Romania should support Ukraine in its democratization process, and, taking into consideration the current events, in preserving the independence of the neighbouring state. Thirdly, regarding the Western Balkans, Romania should negotiate its interests in the international organizations to which it belongs and have a common voice with them in order to secure and to democratize the region. Finally, the priority of Romania regarding the Black Sea aims acquiring the legitimacy needed in order to act as a stabilizing factor in this space charged with potential risks.

We believe that without strengthening the capacity to influence the spread of the European values, democracy and regional security, Romania will be perceived in the international community as a state whose motions are retrograde. So, our position stresses the need of building a regional stability at the European borders through coherent solutions for resolving conflicts and problems still existing in the neighbourhood.

2. REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Part of European and Euro-Atlantic community, Romania has defined its position in the international organizations by promoting European values and interests in order to maintain the stability and the international peace. In its relations with the countries situated outside the European Union, Romania, in accordance with the previous strategies, has acted to spread into neighbouring states to the principles of liberty, democracy and the rule of law. In this regard, Romania was characterized as a pro-active supporter of Moldova's European path, the Eastern Partnership being a link of the relations with its eastern neighbours. According to Romania, the most important partner of the EU under the European Neighbourhood Policy, and its priority by default, is Moldova (Dinu and Ghinea 2012, 11).

The recent challenges arising in Ukraine and Transnistria have created a new situation that requires a concerted effort of international actors in order to preserve the stability and to spread the democratic values in the region. In this context, Romania appears to be a major driver of the European projects in the region. Developing relations with Moldova is of particular importance for Romania, a consistent support of the European aspirations of the neighbouring people and deepening EU-Moldova relationship remaining a priority of Romanian foreign policy. Being considered a key factor in the European route of Moldova, Romania is the only EU member neighbour and "the interface" of EU for the population of Moldova.

The support for Moldova's European integration aspirations as a future priority of Romanian foreign policy should follow several principles that must be firmly applied:

The principle of cooperation – the development of relations with Moldova will respect the principle of cooperation in solving international problems in the

economic, social, cultural and humanitarian fields (UN Charter, Article 1 (3)). The Romania's support will fold on European priorities established between EU and Moldova, the cooperation aiming to further economic and social progress in line with the EU strategies.

The principle of good neighbourliness (UN Charter, Article 74) - As a country whose eastern borders are the eastern borders of the EU, Romania will develop relations with Moldova under the European Neighbourhood Policy whose initiatives aim to bring Moldova closer to the European values.

The principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms - Romania will support Moldova's efforts to respect human rights providing a platform to strengthen the common struggle for fundamental liberties. Also, Romania will use all the levers at its disposal to ensure compliance with this principle.

The principle of non-interference in internal affairs - Romania will act in order to strengthen the economic and political stability of neighbouring state without interfering directly or indirectly in its political, economic, military, cultural or social affairs.

Based on NATO and EU membership and on the premises of cooperation between Moldova and the EU, Romania will increase its efforts to become the interface between Moldova and the EU in order to maximize its position and its influence in the immediate neighborhood, developing a partnership based on values rather than on interests. The spread of the European values in Eastern Europe, namely democracy, stability, human rights and economic progress, not only helps the countries included in the European Neighbourhood Policy, but it is a „win-win game”. The process of Moldova's modernization is irreversible, and Romania, by influencing the reform process to stabilize and democratize the neighbouring state, will be the beneficiary of „a multiplication of opportunities for its own stability and security” (Grămadă 2013). In this context, Romania supports the European perspective of Moldova, aiming to integrate the European fundamental values in its neighbourhood by strengthening the rule of law and the democracy, a functioning market economy and the respect for human rights, in line with the development priorities of Moldova, until 2019 when Romania will hold the Presidency of the EU Council (Ponta 2014). Also, enhancing the ODA status through a programmatic approach able to underwrite the domestic reform programs,

emerges as a priority in the relationship between the two neighbouring countries.

The portfolio of action will support the Moldova's integration, Romania assuming a leadership role in promoting the Moldova's European ideals:

- Support for strengthening the Moldovan administrative capacity in order to improve the fight against corruption, organized crime and illegal migration; in this context, we consider the implementation of „twining” projects (Ghinea and Toma 2013, 20) for transferring the Romanian experience and expertise to Moldovan officials a good action to develop a democratic, transparent and efficient government in the neighbouring state.
- Launching a cross-border project whose activities consist in forming common Romanian-Moldovan teams (Alexandrescu 2014), both in the academic field, for research and innovation, and in the labour market field for implementing common business projects or for gaining experience through knowledge transfer.
- A consistent approach to funding provided by Romania as an European donor for development on multiple dimensions: the first solution entails creating a Development Fund Romania - Moldova and an Agency for Cooperation and Development coordinated by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ghinea et al 2013, 1) in order to save the „100 million for Moldova Programme” offered by Romania and to develop an effective management of future finance; secondly, the funds should follow Moldova's development priorities regarding the European affairs, the financial and administrative support for building the necessary institutions being imperative in the process of Europeanization and implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms (Ghinea, Paul, Chirilă 2013, 4-5); thirdly, Romania should focus on energy and infrastructure projects, the completion of Iasi-Ungheni pipeline and the extension to Chisinau being a target for our country. This should be coupled with the creation of a mixed funding programme jointly administrated by Romania and Moldova and financed through ODA, Neighbourhood Investment Facility and loans from the European credit institutions (Ghinea, Paul, Chirilă 2013, 6). Last but not least, cooperation with other donors involved is essential in order to obtain coherence and success in project implementation (Ghinea, Dinu, Ivan 2010, 23).

- Developing a set of projects for civil society in the fields of democratization, media and social services, managed by the Romanian Development Agency, through one of its structure specialized in cooperation, together with the NGOs that are active in promoting civic participation (Ghinea, Paul, Chirilă 2013, 24).
- Participating in negotiations on the sensitive issue of Transnistria in an international format, following the courses of action agreed at the international level; taking advantage of the situation in Cyprus, Romania will support Moldova's integration in the European Union, isolating the issue of Transnistria and working together with the European Union, the UN, NATO and Russia for peace and security in the region.

3. UKRAINE

Ukraine's importance for the West has grown exponentially with the Russo-Georgian war due to its strategic and energetic location, being crossed by an important number of energy corridors transporting the most important quantity of hydrocarbons from Russia to the EU member states. Moreover, Ukraine is GUAM's informal leader and was announced to be a major military donor for the NATO's missions as well as in supporting ESDP, being actively involved in negotiations for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict (Chifu 2011, 1).

At the time being, the situation generated by the Ukraine's crisis represents a real threat to the security of the EU member states by the fact the current government is a weak one, incapable to control all regions and the potential migrant wave to the EU. Furthermore, this democratic decline has had a negative impact on other countries in the Eastern Partnership, due to the fact that this crisis is happening in Ukraine, the state that had been considered for a long period "The Success Story of the Eastern Partnership", so EU is subject to an indirect image crisis among the Eastern Partners (Tapiola 2013). In this crucial moment in which Ukraine has a difficult mission, that of choosing between two fundamental attributes of the state in the international law, that of maintaining the territorial integrity and sovereignty, we consider that it would be a convenient time for Romania to emerge as a regional leader, thus leaving to highlight the international shadow cone.

Regarding the relationship between Romania and Ukraine, it was always considered a difficult one, despite the fact that our country was the first to recognize the independence of Ukraine and established diplomatic relations starting on February 1, 1992. Nowadays there are a series of mixed formats of dialogue and cooperation: formats of cooperation established on the basis of political decisions at Head of States and formats of cooperation established under the provisions of the treaties, agreements and bilateral and/or trilateral (Ministry of Foreign Affairs website).

Supporting Ukraine's European integration expectations must be a priority of a future Romanian foreign policy strategy that should follow some principles that apply firmly in place:

The principle of cooperation: Romania aims to develop relations with Ukraine according to this principle in order to solve economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems at the international level. (UN Charter, Article.1 (3)). Romania will support Ukraine according to European priorities set between EU and Ukraine, the cooperation aiming to further economic and social progress in line with the European strategies.

The principle of good neighbourliness (UN Charter, Article 74): our country will develop relations with Ukraine according to European Neighbourhood Policy principles, its initiatives aiming to bring Ukraine closer to the European values.

The principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms: Romania will support the democratization and the respect for human rights in Ukraine, aiming to provide a platform that will consolidate the common struggle to defend the fundamental rights and freedoms. Also, Romania will use all the levers at its disposal to ensure compliance with this principle.

The principle of non-interference in internal affairs: Romania's contribution will support the actions that aim to ensure political and economic stability in Ukraine, without direct or indirect interference in its political, economic, military, cultural or social issues.

As a EU Member, Romania has a duty to provide to Ukraine a constant support and assistance for reforms towards democratization and Europeanization of the institutional system. Furthermore, Romania should be more active at European level in order to become the „lawyer” of all the Eastern Partners, but especially of its neighbours, promoting the idea that it is

a necessity to keep Ukraine outside of the sphere of Russian influence, continuing, and intensifying its European path.

The NATO membership and Romania's proximity to Ukraine, can transform it in an important pillar in the NATO-Ukraine cooperation mission whose aim is to implement some long term measures in order to strengthen Ukraine's capacity to ensure its own security. Moreover, NATO condemns Russia's unilateral actions of annexation of territories belonging to Ukraine and continues to support its independence, promoting the principle of inviolability of borders and democratic development. Compliance with these principles represents a sine qua non condition in order to preserve stability and security in Central and Eastern Europe (NATO website). In this respect, we encourage Romania's active involvement in Ukraine's fight to maintain its independence, considering that preserving regional status quo should become our national interest because losing this buffer zone between Russia and West would increase Romania's vulnerability, by having a direct border with Russia.

The bilateral relation between Romania and Ukraine has always been considered difficult in spite of the efforts of cooperation and building mutual trust that both sides undertook during time. The difficulty in establishing these relations was owed to the existence of several points of divergence such as the public acceptance of the verdict issued by the International Court of Justice on the continental shelf of Snakes Island, the attempts by the Ukrainian side to build Bystroye Canal that will have an environmental impact on Danube Delta's flora and fauna, and the situation of minorities in both countries (Cioculescu 2012).

We consider that Romania must see this moment of crisis in Ukraine that brought the change of government in Kiev as a convenient time in order to rebuild bilateral relations. Our country needs a new strategy to confront the challenges brought by the Eastern space and Ukraine cannot be left outside from this project whose major purpose is to diminish Russian influence in the region.

Romania's strands in Ukraine aim to encourage Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic path through:

- Encouraging regional trends that are favourable to European and Euro-Atlantic interests, but also a gradual integration of Ukraine into the EU and NATO and counteract actions that are against these interests.

- Our country's main interest is that the Russian military activities on the Ukrainian territory are not directed against our interest or our partners, but also preventing the use of our neighbour state in an unfriendly form. Moreover, we consider necessary to offer Ukraine some guarantees that we will not conduct anti-Ukrainian activities (Cioculescu 2012).
- Supporting and promoting among our strategic partners the need of keeping Ukraine's territorial integrity and unity. Romania has a direct border with Ukraine, so its territorial integrity and unity is vital for us because in the eventuality of dismantling or federalization, we would come to have a direct border with Russia and this could increase our vulnerability (Ghinea and Toma 2014, 5).
- Identifying an agenda of cooperation that could help to overcome the points of divergence. We believe that this dialogue should be facilitated by the new political context that seeks democratization and Europeanization of Ukraine.
- Strengthening strategic partnership with Poland regarding the Eastern area by harmonizing joint actions. Our country must focus its efforts on the entire Eastern neighbourhood, not just on Moldova. In that respect, we believe that other partners cannot be ignored, especially if the Europeanization success of Moldova depends on Ukraine's stability.

4. WESTERN BALKANS

The Western Balkans represents a diverse region in terms of political, economic and social aspects. The main common feature of the region is the development of a structural problem, namely the reminiscences of more than 50 years under the Yugoslav socialist system, followed by a decade of wars, sanctions, and transmutation of the population. The involvement of EU, NATO and WE highlighted western interest in this area in the events that took place in the post-socialist period, in the attempt to stabilize the area and ensure a long-term peace and prosperity for the region (Sela and Shabani 2011, 23-25). Regional cooperation is a crucial principle for the political stability, security, and economic development of the countries in Western Balkans: Albania, Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Currently, all these have institutionalized their relationship with

the EU through the Stabilization and Association Process launched in 1999, whose aim is to bring peace, stability, and economic development in the area and to open up prospects for European integration. Moreover, on July 1, 2013, Croatia became the 28th member of the EU, the Europeanization road of the other was quite advanced, the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro being candidate countries and Albania having an ongoing application to obtain this status. The Euro-Atlantic dimension hasn't been neglected either by these states, Croatia and Albania became NATO members in 2009 (MAE website).

In order to become effective, this support should be based on some principles in order to have a concrete direction for action:

The principle of cooperation requires an active involvement in the Western Balkans. In this respect, Romania should work with the countries concerned, so that everyone can express their views and interests without feeling threatened.

The principle of flexibility: given the complexity of the region, Romania must adapt to a structure enabling a multidimensional approach.

The principle of partnership: promoting democratic values and regional peace is possible only by identifying common challenges and opportunities.

The principle of non-interference in internal affairs: Romania will develop actions to ensure economic and political stability of the partner states without interfering directly or indirectly in its political, economic, military, cultural, or social issues.

Romania, as a member of the European and Euro-Atlantic community must adopt a concrete regional approach, in accordance with the guidelines established by the organizations it belongs to. Besides this, our country's priorities in the area emerge also from the interest in our own security, which is closely related to the situation in the neighbourhood.

European Union and NATO membership requires a special approach to the area by promoting and supporting the importance of European and Euro-Atlantic paths for the Western Balkan states:

- Our country's involvement in the diplomatic initiatives of the Visegrád Group (Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary) in order to become a relevant force of EU and NATO enlargement in the region is an important direction to action. In this respect, Romania must canalize all its efforts in

order to be part of this format of dialogue at different levels: bilateral, regional and into the Euro-Atlantic institutions (Nič *et al.* 2013).

- We aim to develop a strategic relationship with Serbia in order to encourage its democratization and Europeanization, as well as engaging them in individual partnership with NATO.
- Engaging in a consensual solution for a sustainable relationship with Kosovo. To this end, we should start a dialogue with Belgrade authorities for recognition of this political structure.
- Romania must support any realistic solution in order to solve the issue of state fragility and the lack of societal cohesion existing in Bosnia Herzegovina (Chifu 2013, 51).

5. BLACK SEA REGION

Bridge between continents, the Black Sea is an area of great geopolitical significance, „an Eurasian bridge“ (Valinakis 1999, 27) that open routes for trade and hydrocarbon resources. With Romania and Bulgaria into the European Union, the Black Sea became a border of the Euro-Atlantic area and „NATO's geo-strategic pivot toward East and Asia“ (Lotreanu 2005, 36). Romania's regional importance is shaped by its position as south-east border of the EU, opening the routes to regional trade and investment, by the existence of the Danube Delta, by the relatively low cost of labour and the existence of qualified human resources, by the agricultural, fishery, tourism and shipping potential, but also by its cultural heritage and the fact that it is a meeting point of different cultures: Christian, Islamic and Western (Homorozean 2010, 7).

Based on these premises, as a member of the EU, Romania is one of the main promoters of the Black Sea Synergy project, promoting a flexible framework for dialogue and cooperation in the region and capitalizing all opportunities offered by the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation to develop multilateral projects in order to ensure stability and security in the region (Mocanu 2010, 250-251). Also, three major initiatives of the Romanian strategy in the Black Sea, the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership, the Black Sea Euroregion, the Strategy for the Danube, represent elements through which Romania aims to engage actively in the development of the region, but,

unfortunately, the actually directions lacking force and concrete support of other riparian states.

In this context, we consider necessary to have some principles for action:

The principle of legality: Romania must comply with the Law of the Sea as part of the international law, taking into consideration the primacy of law.

The principle of cooperation: to an active involvement in the Black Sea region, Romania has to work with the other riparian states so that everyone can express their views and interests and not feel threatened.

The principle of flexibility: given the complexity of the region, Romania must adapt to a structure enabling a multidimensional approach.

The partnership principle: promoting democratic values and regional peace is possible by identifying common challenges and opportunities by the riparian states.

Romania's NATO and EU membership requires „a coherent regional approach” (Mocanu 2010, 267), cooperation with the countries of the Black Sea region having the potential to ensure stability and security in the region through cross-border measures in order to eliminate the energy and environmental risks, as well as those caused by the organized crime activities. In this context, is an imperative for the future strategies of Romanian foreign policy to transform its position as a sub-regional leader in a regional leader (Homorozean 2010, 12). In this way, Romania's priority regarding the Black Sea aims that our country acquire the legitimacy needed in order to act as a stabilizing factor in this area full of potential risks. Some possible directions for action are highlighted hereinafter:

- Revitalizing the Black Sea Synergy based on the geostrategic importance of the area, focusing on five dimensions: energy, regional security, environment, transport and regional societal development. In this context, Romania should strive to identify and focus the common interests of the EU member states in the Black Sea area by creating and coordinating a support group of the EU policies in the region, anchoring the EU Strategy to the regional realities: the need for security due to the numerous conflicts existing in the region, turning the Black Sea into an area economically competitive, the high energy potential, the prosperity and the dynamism of commercial activities;
- Increasing the dialogue with Turkey, one of the major players in the region based on the principles of Romania -Turkey Strategic Partnership, using the

potential offered by the membership of the two states in different regional and international organizations (the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Black Sea Forum, the Blackseafor, NATO, the EU etc.) to create a common vision regarding the desired developments in the Black Sea area. In this context, the centre of the relations between the two countries should be represented by energy cooperation, the success of the Romania-Turkey submarine cable project propelling Romania in a leading position in the region in terms of energy export to the EU;

- Romania's Black Sea policy should be integrated and consistent with the purposes and principles set out in the international organizations and forum for dialogue. In this context, abandoning the strategy of becoming a leader in the Black Sea region by proposing additional initiatives that are competitive toward the current scheme of cooperation and using these existing for the effective implementation of projects in energy, security, trade and civil society areas is a course of action vital to the success of Romania in the region.

6. CONCLUSION

Gaining the NATO and EU membership, our country has become the border of Europe and Euro-Atlantic community, fostering a climate of democracy and stability in the neighbourhood earning in importance.

Paying particular attention to Moldova, Ukraine, the Western Balkans, and to the Black Sea region, in this paper we outlined principles, priorities and actions that we consider necessary to be integrated into a Romanian strategic vision on medium and long term. In this context, Romania should be „a vector of stability and security” (Mocanu 2009, p.36) in the neighbourhood, acting as a magnet of the regional cooperation initiatives taking into consideration the principles and the European and Euro-Atlantic cooperation strategies.

Romanian authorities should focus on finding practical solutions to problems existing in the neighbourhood, part of this effort being dedicated to the construction of a cooperation strategy with neighbouring partners in order to establish a comprehensive set of priorities.

Finally, in this paper, we described these priorities as follows: supporting the Moldova's European aspirations, relaunching the bilateral relationship with Ukraine in order to diminish Russian influence in the region, directing the bilateral and multilateral cooperation toward the Western Balkans in order to maintain regional stability and last but not least, creating a Romania's identity as an active player in the Black Sea region in the energy security and the fight against organized crime areas.

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