

## Romania: Black Sea Security and NATO's South-Eastern Frontline<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction: Romania and NATO

Three adjacent flags can be seen flying outside some government buildings in Bucharest: Romania's blue, yellow and red tricolour, the EU circle of stars, and the NATO compass emblem. NATO membership was long sought for by Romania after the end of the Cold War, before its eventual membership in 2004. During the accession process, former Romanian Chief of the General Staff Constantin Degeratu explained: "It is fair to say that no state has conducted a more vehement campaign for NATO membership than Romania. Because Bucharest could not portray itself as a leader in democratization or economic reforms, it has put the emphasis on Romania's strategic location"<sup>2</sup>.

Ten years to the month after Romania joined NATO, Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014. By virtue of its adjacency to the Black Sea, Romania was now part of NATO's southeastern flank. The Ukraine war sparked a sharp deterioration in Russia-West relations, but from a Romanian perspective Russia's overbearing regional presence has been a perennial concern. By reprioritizing the deterrence of Russia, NATO has effectively moved closer to reflecting the concerns of its eastern members, and not least Romania. Wariness of an overbearing Russia is a product of Romania's geography and history. The legacy of repressive rule by Nicolae Ceausescu (1965-1989) has, in Kaplan's view, afforded modern Romania a deep yearning for integration into Western structures like the EU and NATO<sup>3</sup>. Romania's national security calculus essentially seeks to balance against Russia by bandwagoning with the US and west Europeans - a stance that makes NATO's prioritisation of deterring Russia critical to Romanian national security.

Overlap though there may be between the priorities of NATO and Romania's needs, like any member state it must advocate for its concerns and preferences to be reflected in NATO decisions. This paper examines the extent of the overlap between Romania's national security priorities and the deterrent measures adopted by NATO at its Warsaw Summit in July 2016.

To examine this question the paper is structured as follows. First, it characterises Romania's

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<sup>2</sup> Degeratu quoted in Zoltan Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion: Four Case Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). 144-145.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Kaplan, *In Europe's Shadow: Two Cold Wars and a Thirty-Year Journey Through Romanian and Beyond* (New York: Random House, 2016).

security dilemmas in the period leading up to 2016. Next, the main section of this paper examines the extent to which the direction NATO has moved is reflective of Romanian needs and positions, and notably in relation to security in the Black Sea. To conclude, the paper reflects on Romania's contribution to deterring Russia along NATO's southeastern flank, and considers what from a Romanian perspective was not achieved at the Warsaw Summit.

### **1. After 2014, NATO priorities converge with Romanian concerns**

The renewed importance of Romania as a lynchpin in NATO's deterrence of Russia is a product of the changes wrought to European security by the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2014. Whereas once Romanian arguments for greater attention by NATO on the security of east Europe might have fallen on deaf ears, they have had more traction since 2014. The arguments Romania leverages within NATO reflect its self-identification as a frontline state facing a regionally assertive Russia. Although not sharing a border with Russia, Romania occupies a strategically important location along NATO's southeastern flank and with access to the Black Sea (alongside Turkey, Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine and Russia). As its policy experts keenly emphasise, Romanian ports are 230 kilometers from the Crimea peninsula, meaning that its annexation and remilitarization by Russia bear directly on Romania's national security.

Strategic location aside, Romania is not an especially large NATO member, but nor is it a negligibly small one either. Its population is 21.6 million. Of a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$187 billion, 1.49 per cent was spent on defence in 2016. This amounted to an annual defence spend of \$2,780 million, with an active armed forces numbering 70,500<sup>4</sup>. While Romania's importance to NATO has never been greater, things looked very different a decade ago.

Romania hosted the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008. The agenda was divided between NATO's role in Afghanistan and Russia-NATO relations. Russian President Vladimir Putin was invited to the conference, which he duly attended, participating in the NATO-Russia Council, and dining with Romanian President Traian Basescu. Putin vehemently opposed US plans for ballistic missile defence bases in east Europe, as well as further NATO expansion through Membership Action Plans to Georgia and Ukraine. The Bucharest NATO summit was a prelude to disaster. Four months later the Russia-Georgia war took place in August 2008. The *casus belli* was President Mikheil Saakashvili's attempts to assert Georgia's authority over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia nominally fought on behalf of these territories to resist Tbilisi's rule, but the deeper cause of Russia's ire was Georgia's prospects for NATO membership. Russian authority has been forcefully reasserted, and its red lines around the post-Cold War order in Europe have now been re-drawn.

Storm clouds were brewing over the horizon. "Everything changed for Romania in 2008. The strategic vacation for Romania was over", reflected Iulian Fota, former National Security Advisor to

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<sup>4</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 2017* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016).

Romania's President, who also pointed out the additional concern of the financial crisis in 2008 perhaps reducing Western resources and attention spans for thinking about security in east Europe<sup>5</sup>. Even before 2008, Romania had warned about a need to be vigilant of Russia. In September 2005, President Basescu warned of the Black Sea becoming "a Russian lake"<sup>6</sup>. In January 2006, asked by a Russian official about US military bases in Romania, Basescu shot back: "You [Russia] remained in Romania for thirty years, and we never asked you why you did this<sup>7</sup>." This lingering historic antipathy was explained away by the US as reflecting old fashioned Russophobia. At this time US priorities for NATO were invested in Afghanistan and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Romania contributed troops to ISAF, building goodwill with the US, even if stabilisation in the name of counter terrorism was not high on Romania's defence priorities.

Greater convergence between NATO's overarching priorities and Romanian's concerns were in evidence by NATO's summit in Wales (4-5 September 2014). Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its stoking of an undeclared war in the Donbas region altered the stakes of European security beyond recognition. By coincidence, the ISAF mission in Afghanistan ended in 2014, replaced by a smaller training mission. The period between the Wales and Warsaw summits saw Russian assertions of power in Ukraine, in Syria, and in Russia's alleged sponsorship of online influence activities aimed at public opinion in Western countries. NATO's original *raison detre* - the deterrence of Russia - was once again core to its mission.

### **(1) Romanian strategic national security priorities ahead of the NATO Warsaw summit**

How effectively has Romania leveraged this greater convergence between Romania's priorities and the redirection of NATO attention back to Europe? In the period between the Wales and Warsaw NATO summits, Romanian politicians and official documents articulated the country's positions. The Presidential Administration published a "National Defence Strategy, 2015-2019", which stated:

The main warranty provider when it comes to Romania's security is the North Atlantic Alliance, the transatlantic relationship representing the strategic binder which awards coherence and consistency to NATO actions. The solidity of the transatlantic relationship depends on the US maintaining their commitment in Europe, as well as the way allies and European partners will allot financial assistance to develop their own defense capabilities<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Iulian Fota, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Ruxandra Ivan, 'Black Sea Regional Leadership in Romanian Foreign Policy Discourse', in Ruxandra Ivan (ed.), *New Regionalism or no Regionalism? Emerging Regionalism in the Black Sea Area* (London and New York: Rutledge), pp. 155-174.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Ruxandra Ivan.

<sup>8</sup> The Presidential Administration, *National Defence Strategy, 2015-2019: A Strong Romania in Europe and the World* (Bucharest, 2015), p. 12.

Another policy document, “The Military Strategy of Romania,” provided a detailed explanation of Romania’s contribution to NATO: “In terms of the NATO Force Structure, Romania hosts the following: the Multinational Division Southeast Headquarters; the NATO Force Integration Unit; the Deployable Communications Module Element; and the Deveselu Missile Defense Base<sup>9</sup>.” Both documents stress Romania’s desire to make an active contribution to NATO.

Ahead of the Warsaw summit, President Klaus Iohannis was keen to restate that Romania’s contribution to NATO’s collective defence would not be adversely effected by a major domestic political crisis. The president had been forced to name a new prime minister when Victor Ponta resigned in November 2015 after thousands took to the streets following a fatal fire at a heavy metal concert in Bucharest (the protesters attributed the fire to lax regulation and official corruption in managing the venue)<sup>10</sup>. In January 2016, President Iohannis delivered a speech in which he restated that:

The Strategic Partnership with the US, our membership of NATO and to the EU have been and will remain the fundamental pillars underpinning Romania’s foreign policy. I have stated... that I want Romania to be not only a beneficiary, but also a provider of security in the region, to strengthen its profile and to consolidate its role within NATO and the EU. The organisation in Bucharest of the meeting that brought together the leaders of all the European states on the eastern flank, ahead of the NATO summit in Warsaw in the summer of 2016, the meetings I had with my counterparts in the EU Members States, but also in our neighbourhood, pursued the same line. The signing by all political players on increasing the [Romanian] defence budget to 2 per cent of the GDP by 2017, with a first increment already completed in 2016, is the practical materialisation of the same goal<sup>11</sup>.

The US, NATO and EU are Romania’s “triangle of survival”, in the words of Major General (retired) Mihail Ionescu, Director of the Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History, which belongs to Romania’s Ministry of Defense.<sup>12</sup> In terms of balancing the demands of these relationships, Iulian Chifu, former Presidential Advisor on Strategic Affairs, Security and Foreign Policy

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<sup>9</sup> Romania Ministry of Defense, *The Military Strategy of Romania: Modern Armed Forces for a Powerful Romania in Europe and Around the World* (Bucharest, 2016), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Tran, “Bucharest nightclub fire: PM and government resign after protests”, *The Guardian*, 4 November 2015.

<sup>11</sup> President Klaus Iohannis, “The speech addressed by the President of Romania on the occasion of the annual meeting with the representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited in Bucharest”, 21 January 2016. <http://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/discursuri/the-speech-addressed-by-the-president-of-romania-on-the-occasion-of-the-annual-meeting-with-the-representatives-of-the-diplomatic-corps-accredited-in-bucharest>

<sup>12</sup> Mihail Ionescu, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

(2011-2014), and now President of the Centre for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning, explains the countervailing forces facing Romania:

We don't see any contradiction between the US and NATO. We can only see contradictions between NATO and the EU. NATO is not multi-speed like the EU. If you contribute in NATO, you have a voice. [From Romania's perspective, there is] no difference between the relationship with the US and membership of NATO and no tensions... Between the EU and the US, yes [there can be tensions], because of course the US is not in the EU... [Moreover], not all countries in NATO are equally engaged in protecting the eastern flank. We are equally open to all. But the US has responded much more consistently. France, for example, has never been as consistent on security matters [in relation to Russia and east Europe].<sup>13</sup>

With these national priorities in mind, Romania locates its security in NATO's collective defence efforts aimed at deterring Russia, and seeks prominent contributions to these efforts. What follows is a thematic analysis of the extent to which the Warsaw summit reflected Romanian priorities.

## **2. Warsaw 2016: advancing Romanian policy priorities in NATO**

Judged in overall terms Romania has reason to be broadly satisfied with the outcomes of the NATO Warsaw summit. Overall, the summit was an important milestone in reversing the trend of declining Western military commitments in east European security. After 9/11, the US had downsized its European military deployments as its attention turned towards stabilisation and counterterrorism in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and as it sought to balance rising Chinese power in the Asia-Pacific. The Ukraine war set in motion a partial reversal of this trend, with NATO's intent clear at the Wales summit, before more specific measures were announced at Warsaw two years later. After the Warsaw summit, President Iohannis posted the following message on social media:

Today, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, announced that the Alliance would turn a Romanian brigade into an international one to strengthen NATO's presence in south-eastern Europe. The statement therefore confirms that initiatives and goals proposed by Romania to this summit are taking shape and will be found in the final documents of the meeting<sup>14</sup>."

Providing nuance as to the extent of Romanian satisfaction at the results of the Warsaw summit,

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<sup>13</sup> Iulian Chifu, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

<sup>14</sup> "NATO Summit in Warsaw: Romanian Brigade to Turn into Multinational One, Stoltenberg Says", The Romania Journal, <http://www.romaniajournal.ro/nato-summit-in-warsaw-romanian-brigade-to-turn-into-multinational-one-stoltenberg-says/>

Iulian Fota explained: “It is clear we are on the right track”, and that Romania can be “half happy” with the measures introduced at Warsaw.<sup>15</sup> Where were the gaps between Romanian expectation and the realities of the NATO collective response?

### **(1) Land-based forces: the NATO ‘Tailored Presence’ on the southeastern flank**

Lessening the distinction between the NATO “Enhanced Forward Presence” on the northern flank, and the NATO “Tailored Presence” on the southern flank, is a matter that has energized Romanian officials. Ahead of the summit President Iohannis said: “It is important, and I have emphasized this every time, that on the eastern flank, we expect from our allies to be considered equal allies, for the whole eastern flank to be considered important to NATO and a balanced approach and consolidation of the eastern flank exist<sup>16</sup>.” The summit communique first presented an “*enhanced* forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland”, before stating:

We will also develop a *tailored* forward presence in the southeast part of the Alliance territory... including the Romanian initiative to establish a multinational framework brigade to help improve integrated training of Allied units under Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast... Options for a strengthened NATO air and maritime presence will also be assessed<sup>17</sup>.

Instead of constructing permanent bases, NATO had instead opted for dispatching brigades of troops to each of the key frontline states so as, in the words of US Defense Secretary Ash Carter, to move NATO towards a “full deterrence posture” to thwart outside aggression<sup>18</sup>. The prominence Romania receives as hosting the Multinational Headquarters is considerable, and while NATO being back in east Europe can only be a good thing from Bucharest’s perspective, there are some lingering Romanian concerns. According to Iulian Fota, “We want to see the forces permanent, not rotational.” Moreover, “We don’t want different wording between the north and southern flank regarding the NATO presence in the east.” As Fota elucidates:

I don’t want to say that the Black Sea is more important than the Baltic Sea, but I don’t want it to be treated as *less* important. We are *all* frontline states. From a technical point of view I accept different solutions [along different parts of NATO’s eastern flank]. But from a political view,

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<sup>15</sup> Iulian Fota, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

<sup>16</sup> President Iohannis, quoted on “Embassy of Romania in the Republic of Korea” Website: <https://seoul.mae.ro/en/romania-news/6812>

<sup>17</sup> Italics added. Warsaw Summit Communique, 9 July 2016, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm)

<sup>18</sup> Janusz Bugajski and Peter Doran, *Black Sea Defended: NATO Responses to Russia’s Black Sea Offensive*, Center for European Policy Analysis (Washington DC/Warsaw: July 2016), p. 13.

why are we using different language? Also, from a Russian perspective, it is in the southern parts of Europe that they are more active.... Russia sees opportunities [for building influence and for subversion] in Serbia, Albania, Montenegro...All we can do is to continue to advocate our cause<sup>19</sup>.

Major General (retired) Ionescu further explained that the “Tailored Presence” language is intended to be non-confrontational and non-escalatory: “In Warsaw it was established that we keep the door open for dialogue with Russia, but from a position of strength.” However, Ionescu also reflected on the contradiction that while NATO had placed greater emphasis on deterrence along its northeastern flank, it is in fact along the southeastern flank where a greater Russian threat is discernible<sup>20</sup>.

In advocating its position, Romania runs into a challenge. Whereas NATO’s northeastern flank countries (Poland and the Baltic States) could make more of a coherent case, Romania was bedeviled by the differing policy priorities of Turkey and Bulgaria. The Baltic States and Poland advocated their needs to the US through the Nordic lobby, enlisting Scandinavian countries to assist in articulating the importance of the northern flank. Comparatively speaking, fostering regional cooperation between Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey was far harder – something that is explained in discussing the specific matter of Black Sea security.

## **(2) Naval forces: Romanian advocacy for a greater NATO presence in the Black Sea**

Well ahead of the Warsaw summit Romania had advocated for a permanent NATO naval presence in the Black Sea – an area which it perceives a direct Russian threat accentuated by the annexation of Crimea. Moreover, in Putin’s own words, broadcast in an interview with US director Oliver Stone, “right now we are commissioning a new military base in Novorossiysk<sup>21</sup>.” Novorossiysk hosts Russia’s main Black Sea port. The matter of Black Sea security is essential for Romania, but at the same time it is a difficult arena in which NATO can demonstrate sustained commitment.

Major General (retired) Ionescu explained: “The Russian presence in Crimea is a direct and imminent threat to Romania. Romania has pressed NATO to have a strong presence in the Black Sea. NATO has refused to do that.”<sup>22</sup> Former presidential advisor Chifu echoes these points, that the Russian remilitarization of Crimea in 2014, of Abkhazia, and the 2015 Syrian intervention leading to a Russian presence in the Mediterranean, has intensified the need for NATO to respond. Romania had long since advocated for an extension of NATO activities in the Black Sea, making this point even before it had joined the alliance. “It didn’t fly”, said Chifu, in no small measure due to the Turkish interpretations of

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<sup>19</sup> Iulian Fota, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Mihail Ionescu, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Oliver Stone, “The Putin Interviews: Part Three”, (Showtime: 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Mihail Ionescu, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

the 1936 Montreaux Convention which stipulates only littoral states - and not other countries or alliances - can have a standing naval presence in the Black Sea.<sup>23</sup> The tonnage and time spent in the Black Sea by ships from non-littoral states is constrained to 21 days, and submarines and aircraft carriers of non-littoral states are banned altogether<sup>24</sup>.

Ahead of the Warsaw summit, Bogdan Aurescu, Foreign Policy Adviser to President Iohannis explained: “We are pleased to see that more attention is being dedicated to the Black Sea, but it’s not enough. It is important that all partners have the same assessment of threats in the Black Sea region.” Aurescu went on to articulate his view that: “The Black Sea is the most complex security environment on NATO’s doorstep. We must go from reassurance to deterrence. It’s obvious we need more NATO presence in the Black Sea, and we have the full support of the U.S. for this initiative<sup>25</sup>.” In the event, Romanian proposals for a multinational Black Sea flotilla to operate in full respect of international conventions<sup>26</sup>, were undone by a mixture of the misaligned<sup>26</sup> priorities of Turkey and Bulgaria, and NATO concerns of inadvertent escalation.

The Warsaw Communique specifies the Black Sea’s importance, and highlights “Russia’s destabilising actions and policies”, Russia’s “use of its military presence in the Black Sea to project power into the Eastern Mediterranean”, and states that “We...are concerned by Russia’s efforts and stated plans for further military build-up in the Black Sea region.” But the Communique was less specific than when compared to land-based measures. As far as remedial action, the Communique says: “We will continue to support, as appropriate, regional efforts by the Black Sea littoral states aimed at ensuring security and stability.” In other words, it is vague on actions.

Complex regional relations near the Black Sea have much to do with this outcome. Turkey and Russia are historic rivals in the Black Sea region. In centuries past the Russian Empire and Ottoman Empire vied for influence, fighting each other in the nineteenth centuries during the Crimean War (1853-56) and the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78). In the twentieth century, the Black Sea region remained a significant arena for the rivalry right until both empires collapsed due to the strains of Great War<sup>27</sup>. Difficult and divisive relations among the countries in the region have persisted to this day. In his study of the Black Sea’s littoral history, Neal Ascherson observes that “my sense of Black Sea life...is that

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<sup>23</sup> Iulian Chifu, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Janusz Bugajski and Peter Doran, *Black Sea Imperatives: Ensuring NATO Security and American Interests for the Incoming US Administration*, Center for European Policy Analysis (Washington DC/Warsaw: November 2016), ps. 4, 11, 13

<sup>25</sup> Bogdan Aurescu interview with Janusz Bugajski, 30 June 2016.  
<https://www.washdiplomat.com/PouchArticle/cms/using-joomla/extensions/components/content-component/featured-articles/78-october-19-2013/458-as-nato-summit-looms-romanian-official-urges-more-focus-on-black-sea.html>

<sup>26</sup> Bugajski and Doran, *Black Sea Defended*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

latest mistrust between different cultures and communities is immortal<sup>28</sup>.”

Rapprochement between Turkey and Russia over Syria’s war has been surprising since they backed opposing sides, and after a Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian Sukhoi-24 fighter-bomber in November 2015. Occupying the void left by the US refusal to decisively intervene in the Syrian war has perhaps driven their rapprochement. This has been a negative development for Romania. Turkey has become resistant to backing a more substantial NATO role in the Black Sea, and has opposed amending the Montreux Convention<sup>29</sup>. In Fota’s view: “Turkey we expected to be upset with our proposal. But Bulgaria was also resistant, because they are worried about pressure from Turkey and because they want cooperative behavior with Russia<sup>30</sup>.” Indeed, as the Warsaw summit was closing on 9 July 2016, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Metodiev Borissov recommended that the Black Sea be proclaimed a “demilitarized zone.” In Borissov’s words: “I always say that I want the Black Sea to see sailboats, yachts, large boats with tourists and not become an arena of military action ... I do not need a war in the Black Sea<sup>31</sup>.”

This placed Bulgaria at odds with NATO’s overarching position that it would increase its presence in the Black Sea<sup>32</sup>. NATO discussed Black Sea security at subsequent defense ministerials. At the February 2017 meeting at NATO Headquarters in Belgium, in a press conference with President Iohannis, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced: “an increased NATO naval presence in the Black Sea for enhanced training, exercises and situational awareness, and a maritime coordination function for our Standing Naval Forces when operating with other Allied forces in the Black Sea region<sup>33</sup>.” He further explained that

The Black Sea is about many different elements. It’s about the land element, the sea, naval element and the air element and you asked about the naval element and that is about our standing naval force which will then more frequently move into the Black Sea. They will conduct exercises together with all the allies and also increase our situational awareness through more naval presence... We will have increased presence in the Black Sea but it will be measured, it will be defensive and it will in no way aim at provoking any conflict or escalating tensions...<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Neal Ascherson, *Black Sea*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Bugajski and Doran, *Black Sea Imperatives*, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Iulian Fota, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Reuters, “Bulgaria Says Will Not Join Any NATO Black Sea Fleet After Russian Warning”. 16 June 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Bugajski and Doran, *Black Sea Defended*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> “Joint press conference NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg together with the President of Romania, Klaus Werner Iohannis”, 9 October 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_147688.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_147688.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>34</sup> “Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg Following the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. February 16, 2017.

Thus, Romania has seen delayed and partial success in its advocacy of a NATO maritime response to Russian remilitarisation of the Black Sea, coming sometime after the Warsaw summit.

### **(3) Ballistic Missile Defence: synergies between Romania's bilateral US relationship and NATO**

The synergies Romania leverages in its bilateral partnership with the US, and its membership in NATO, is crucial to advancing its national security interests. Bilateral relations with the US are conducted in support of and outside of NATO's multilateral chambers, but for Romania, the greater diplomatic yields will come from drawing deftly on both bilateral and multilateral channels.

No policy area better encapsulates this principle as Romania's role in Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD), control in Europe over which has transferred from the US to NATO. Romania's role is pivotal since it hosts the Aegis Ashore site at its base in Deveselu (which is 180 kilometers west of Bucharest). The Warsaw Communique stated:

At our Summit in Chicago in 2012, we declared the achievement of an Interim NATO BMD Capability as an operationally significant first step... The Aegis Ashore site in Deveselu, Romania represents a significant portion of this increase in capability, and the command and control (C2) of the Aegis Ashore site is being transferred to NATO<sup>35</sup>.

The technology and political will behind the BMD programme emanates from the US. In Bogdan Aurescu's words, a concrete US presence in Romania "is important from a psychological point of view" since it "shows we will never go back under the Russian sphere of influence. This is why Russia is so upset about our Aegis offshore missile defense system<sup>36</sup>."

By taking an active role Romania has increased its importance to the US and elevated its position in NATO's defence arrangement for Europe, at the expense of Russian ire. NATO has been keen to reassure Russia that BMD sites such as Deveselu are intended to defend against potential missile threats from Iran and North Korea, and are not offensive and do not negate Russia's strategic deterrent. However, Putin has interpreted any steps that question the viability or Russia's nuclear deterrent or alter the strategic balance in Europe as destabilising. In his own words, as explained to Oliver Stone:

I see a threat. The threat consists of the fact that once NATO comes to this or that country, the political leadership of that country as a whole, along with its population, cannot influence the decisions NATO takes, including the decision related to stationing the military infrastructure.

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[https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/opinions\\_141340.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/opinions_141340.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>35</sup> Warsaw Summit Communique, 9 July 2016,

<sup>36</sup> Bogdan Aurescu interview with Janusz Bugajski, 30 June 2016.

Even very sensitive weapon systems can be deployed. I am also talking about the anti ballistic missile systems<sup>37</sup>.

In this regard, the Warsaw summit was just another step in Romania's long standing closeness with the US over BMD. A year after the NATO Lisbon summit in 2010, Romania agreed to host a US BMD system. When the Aegis Ashore system at Deveselu became active on 12 May 2016, it was years in the making, and part of a wider missile defense network including radar in Turkey, command and control in Germany, and Aegis-equipped cruisers in the Mediterranean. Since then, in 2017, the US has also agreed to sell Romania the Patriot Missile Defence System, yet another step in US-Romanian defence technology collaboration.

#### **(4) Cyber: Romania's role in the 'Ukraine Cyber Defence Trust Fund Project'**

Major General (retired) Ionescu explains: "We are charged to be a leading nation on cyber security for the region<sup>38</sup>". In this regard, Romania's notable contribution is to the NATO Ukraine Cyber Defence Trust Fund, the objective of which is:

To help Ukraine develop technical capabilities to counter cyber threats. Assistance will include establishing an Incident Management Centre to monitor cyber security events, as well as laboratories to investigate cyber security incidents. Ukraine will also receive training in employing this technology and equipment, as well as practical advice on policy development'<sup>39</sup>.

Romania is the lead nation of this Cyber Defence Trust Fund with the support of Albania, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Turkey and the United States. Romania stated its interest to lead the project during the NATO Wales summit in 2014.

The Romanian company in charge of the project, Rasirom, was established in 1995<sup>40</sup>. The company is owned by the Romanian state and is in charge of the Trust Fund's implementation<sup>41</sup>. Rasirom operates "under the coordination of the Romanian Intelligence Service and we are integrators of physical and IT security solutions. Our main goals are to secure national and European critical infrastructure and

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<sup>37</sup> Oliver Stone, "The Putin Interviews: Part Three", (Showtime: 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Mihail Ionescu, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

<sup>39</sup> "NATO's Support to Ukraine". *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. July 2016. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_07/20160627\\_1607-factsheet-nato-ukraine-support-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-nato-ukraine-support-eng.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> "About Us". *Rasirom*. <http://www.rasirom.ro/en/about-us.html>

<sup>41</sup> "Ukraine Cyber Defence: NATO Trust Fund". *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_07/20160712\\_1606-trust-fund-ukr-cyberdef.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160712_1606-trust-fund-ukr-cyberdef.pdf)

to ensure national strategic objectives<sup>42</sup>”. Rasirom’s website shows that they are slated to end the Trust Fund work sometime in 2017. The work involves bolstering Ukraine’s defences against cyber-attacks it has consistently attributed to Russia, examines such attacks, and trains and advises Ukrainian teams on defensive measures<sup>43</sup>.

Since September 2013, a senior Romanian diplomat – Ambassador Sorin Ducaru - has held NATO’s post of Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges<sup>44</sup>. While Ducaru represents NATO in this role, the seniority of his appointment has been a source of diplomatic influence for Romania, boosting its profile as an active NATO member. Ducaru has explained NATO’s cyber defence work: “We have established information exchange platforms from... a malware information sharing platform up to an exchange of analysis and even intelligence that is relevant for cyber defence<sup>45</sup>.” The prominence of Romania’s role in these initiatives in may help to expand and diversify its profile in NATO in the future.

### **Conclusion: Romania, NATO and credible deterrence**

As an active member of the alliance, and with a strong defence relationship with the US, it is hard to see how Romania could get much more from NATO. The matter holding Romania back is the misalignments in diplomatic positioning and priorities with fellow regional NATO members, Turkey and Bulgaria. How satisfied has Romania been with what NATO has committed to regarding Black Sea naval security? It is “quite reassuring”, says former presidential advisor Chifu, regarding the NATO naval forces involved in joint exercises. On the matter of regional leadership, Chifu is realistic as to just what Romania can expect to achieve:

Romania has no ambition to be a regional leader. We do not have the capabilities or the support of our regional neighbours to assume this kind of leadership. Instead, we can be the initiator and supporter of initiatives, and we can help put the pieces of the puzzle together<sup>46</sup>.

In this regard, as a vital piece of the puzzle along NATO’s southeastern flank, Romania has positioned itself sensibly in the post-2014 period of increasing tensions with Russia. This still leaves plenty of work for Romania in advancing its concerns as relating to the Black Sea in particular. For

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<sup>42</sup> “About Us”.

<sup>43</sup> “Ukraine Cyber Defence: NATO Trust Fund”.

<sup>44</sup> “Ambassador Sorin Ducaru: Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges 2013. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. September 23, 2015. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/who\\_is\\_who\\_49759.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/who_is_who_49759.htm)

<sup>45</sup> “CYBERSEC Insights 2017: Ambassador Sorin Ducaru on NATO’s Cyber Defence Policy”. *YouTube*. October 27, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAjSaPnhTyw>

<sup>46</sup> Iulian Chifu, Interview, Bucharest, 1 November 2017.

Romania, Russia is the perennial national security concern, whereas for NATO it might once again prove transitory, and must be balanced with other Alliance priorities.

Symbolism is critical to deterrence. The efficacy of deterrence hinges on credibility, which involves the possession of capabilities plus conveyance of a will to act if needed. For Romania, the symbolism of deterrence has been important in its reassurance. For Chifu, the pronouncements at Warsaw comprised of a “balanced, proportionate reaction, and were also very symbolic acts involving the presence of all allies who would be fighting in the first instance.” In October 2017, General Nicolae Ciucă, Romanian Chief of Defence, restated Romania’s position:

...the security situation from the Baltic Sea through the Black Sea and into the Mediterranean is not seen merely as a regional issue, but it is of concern to the entire Alliance. Considering the threats towards the Eastern Flank as a whole, NATO deterrence and defence posture rely on coherence and consistency. Hence, the EFP and TFP are linked and should be approached as a single Forward Presence....<sup>47</sup>

Whether NATO equalizes the status and language of its deployments right across its eastern flank remains to be seen. Romania may have to accept that part in parcel of the symbolism of deterrence is the avoidance of inadvertent escalation with Russia.

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<sup>47</sup> “Speech Held by the Chief of General Staff Nicolae Ciucă, at the Defence and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Bucharest October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017”. *Ministry of National Defence*. October 7, 2017. [http://english.mapn.ro/cpresa/4882\\_Speech-held-by-the-Chief-of-General-Staff,-General-Nicolae-Ciuc%C4%83,-at-the-Defence-and-Security-Committee-of-the-NATO-Parliamentary-Assembly,-Bucharest-October-7th,-2017](http://english.mapn.ro/cpresa/4882_Speech-held-by-the-Chief-of-General-Staff,-General-Nicolae-Ciuc%C4%83,-at-the-Defence-and-Security-Committee-of-the-NATO-Parliamentary-Assembly,-Bucharest-October-7th,-2017)

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