

A SHARED NEIGHBORHOOD

The worrying events in Kiev have shown us that peace and stability in Eastern Europe should not be taken for granted; on the contrary, they should be carefully fostered and protected. Both Turkey and Romania wish to have a stable and prosperous common neighborhood. These two countries' common approach toward European principles and ideals, which are also those promoted through the Eastern Partnership. This article focuses on the Eastern Partnership and the EU's efforts in driving forward this important policy, while also underlining the importance of Turkey's involvement in it.

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Recent developments in Ukraine have brought Eastern Europe back in the headlines across the globe. The worrying events in Kiev have shown us that peace and stability in Eastern Europe should not be taken for granted; on the contrary, they should be carefully fostered and protected. The key ingredients for a peaceful and sustainable solution to the crisis in Ukraine are a region-wide constructive perspective, European support based on clear criteria, and sustaining democratic reforms in Ukrainian society.

Both Turkey and Romania wish to have a stable and prosperous common neighborhood. This article will focus on the Eastern Partnership and the EU's efforts in driving forward this important policy. Turkey's contribution in the region, as seen from the Eastern Partnership's perspective, would be beneficial and would also help advance the European project.

As former Ambassador of Romania to Ankara, I can say without doubt that our two countries can closely cooperate and synchronize their efforts to achieve the goal of a stable and prosperous common neighborhood. Before exploring the form such efforts can take, this article will lay out some fundamental aspects of bilateral relations between Romania and Turkey.



Bilateral Relations Between Romania and Turkey

Romania and Turkey are strong strategic partners. On the basis of the Strategic Partnership signed in 2011, our relation has steadily grown into a mature and close cooperation, reflecting the two countries' status as partners and allies, sharing common goals and similar concerns in regional and global security, as well as matters of

stability. Moreover, we consider Turkey as our close friend and neighbor, sharing a rich history and a common geography in the Black Sea region.

The Action Plan for Strategic Partnership contains all the important projects that cover various fields of cooperation, ranging from foreign affairs and political dialogue to economic, industrial, military, environmental, and cultural sectors. It also covers European, regional, and international affairs.

Romania is paying special attention to the economic aspects of bilateral relations with Turkey, and specifically to short- and medium-term results in energy-, transportation-, and agriculture-related projects. Turkey is Romania's

fifth economic partner, and the first economic partner that is outside the EU but within the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). In 2013, our bilateral exchanges reached nearly six billion dollars and we are hoping to see them reach 10 billion dollars in the following years.

Romania is among the strongest supporters of Turkey's European integration and attaches high importance to cooperation with Turkey in NATO and other regional institutional frameworks. This gives expression to the common interests shared in our neighborhood. Romania truly believes that European integration in Turkey's case is a two-way street, bringing benefits for both Turkey and EU member states.

Turkey enjoys a very important geostrategic location by spanning two continents and connecting Europe and Asia to Africa. Turkey is the land bridge to Europe and as such its strategic potential is remarkable. Linking these three continents offers a space of rich and dynamic confluences. Turkey is a European, Asian, Balkan, Caucasian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and Black Sea country, all at the same time. In this context, it is also very important to highlight Turkey's fundamental role in creating connections between different cultures and civilizations, to establish a bridge between East and West.

Therefore, we believe that in addition to the expected benefits in respect to the single market and in the fields of trade, investment, and energy cooperation, Turkey's

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integration would strengthen the European Union’s profile as a global actor, and would strongly impact perspectives on the EU’s Southeastern proximity. Turkey’s role is significant; together with Romania and other member states we could greatly improve Europe’s presence and impact in our common neighborhood.

We also support Turkey’s EU accession from the perspective of enhancing the Black Sea region’s synergy and building increased levels of trust and confidence in the region. In order to further

our priority of cooperation in this region, Romania and Turkey have traditionally maintained an open and fruitful dialogue. Romania has always encouraged Turkey’s involvement as a key actor in the wider Black Sea and Eastern Europe regions, arguing that there is a need for a pragmatic approach towards cooperation in this region.

The Eastern Partnership is a platform that offers the adequate tools for a more active cooperation in the region. Our common approach towards a stable and prosperous shared neighborhood is founded on the same European principles and ideals. These values are the same as those promoted through the Eastern Partnership.

Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership is a key element of EU’s external action and an essential instrument for promoting European identity and values in its Eastern neighborhood. The Partnership actively contributes to connecting the European Union to its Eastern neighbors, both in terms of democratic values and principles, and in terms of political association and economic integration. By promoting the values of democracy and a market economy eastwards, it aims at transforming the Union’s immediate Eastern vicinity into an area of stability, prosperity, and democracy.

The Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are included in this regional cooperation dimension, which basically covers a territory that extends from the EU’s eastern border to the Caucasus. Realistically, under the Eastern Partnership umbrella there are six countries that are rather different in their ambitions to politically associate with and economically integrate in the European Union.

The Eastern Partnership's objectives are of special relevance in the current geopolitical context because of its direct contribution to creating a common space of security, democratic stability, and socio-economic development in the wider Black Sea region. Romania fully supports these goals, tirelessly advocating for active and concrete involvement of the Union in its Eastern neighborhood. The support we have continuously given to partner countries within the Eastern Partnership is part of Romania's efforts toward projecting an area of stability and democracy beyond the EU in the wider Black Sea region.

Association and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements are the most ambitious agreements ever negotiated between the EU and Eastern partner countries. They represent instruments stimulating reforms and modernization, with huge potential for transformation in administration, economic environment, and society. By concluding these



agreements, the EU will enter a new phase of the relationship with those partner states that have showed determination, ambition, and perseverance, but most of all willingness in attaining their goals and getting closer to the Union.

In 2013, EU policy toward its Eastern neighbors was marked by the Eastern Partnership summit which took place in Vilnius on 28-29 November. The Summit was both an instance of reflection on the progress made within this framework and a proactive approach regarding the way forward. Unfortunately, one of the objectives of the Summit was not attained, with Ukraine failing to sign the Association and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements.

Despite this obvious disappointment, the Vilnius Summit brought very positive developments for two partner states that proved their willingness and determination to pursue their European aspirations. In Vilnius, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia initialed their Association Agreements, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with the EU.

Several months ago, we thought that the results of the Eastern Partnership Vilnius Summit were generally predictable. However, the outcome of the summit in Vilnius proved that progress is not irreversible. Challenges in our Eastern neighborhood

are greater than we expected –or acknowledged– in terms of strategic cooperation with partners, but also in terms of a sustainable stabilization, security, and a genuine commitment to democratic values.

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It is essential for the citizens of Ukraine and of other partners in the Eastern Neighborhood to be able to choose freely the destiny of their own countries. European anchoring and EU integration processes, especially when they enjoy such broad public support in these countries, must continue.

A large majority of these people clearly appear to believe that political and economic integration with Europe is the way ahead for them to consolidate democracy, and to enable economic development and lasting prosperity. Their will must be respected by all actors in the region. Nowadays in Europe, it is unacceptable to witness situations in which this fundamental right of the people to make choices for their own future is put under question or doubt by internal or external actors.

There can be no sustainable internal stability as long as democratic mechanisms are not fully functional in these countries. Equally, there can be no true regional stability when external interferences aim to make one country or another act contrary to the aspirations and free choices of its own people.

Also, it is probably the time for the international community to openly admit how the so-called “frozen conflicts” have been openly turned into a tool. They are used as leverage to shape internal developments and foreign policy options of the countries living in the proximity of such realities. Romania stands firm in saying that our partners in the Eastern Neighborhood cannot be restrained in their evolution because of such security-related challenges. This vicious circle needs to be broken, and Europe can play a decisive part in this regard.

In the Euro-Atlantic community we should think in a more focused manner of what we can do to concretely guarantee that the pro-European choices of our partners are respected.

Of course options might differ from one country to another. The Republic of Moldova is Romania’s main priority in the Eastern Neighborhood. As such, we have assumed the promotion of its European integration as a major foreign policy project. From this perspective, we will not hesitate to make available to the

Republic of Moldova all the required political and pragmatic support, in any available working format. We owe it to the citizens to help ensure the achievement of their desire for European integration, in accordance with their very clear-cut and firmly expressed options.

Very important fields of cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership are mobility and the goal of visa liberalization, which will promote people to people contacts and thus greater regional political, economic, and social cooperation. Being one of the

partner states that has advanced substantially in implementing reforms needed to achieve visa liberalization, the Republic of Moldova made remarkable progress in this area. We hope this will be achieved as soon as possible in 2014, thus generating tangible benefits for its society as a whole.

I think the Vilnius moment was perceived as a wake-up call by the European and Euro-Atlantic democracies. It is now clear enough that our challenge with the Eastern Partnership policies is not only about its marketing, i.e., about the way we try to present our political and economic offer in a mutually beneficial way. It is closely related to the substance of our offer as well.

We need to rethink, to more clearly work out the content of our policy towards our Eastern neighbors, in terms of both the benchmarks they have to meet and the support we have committed to offer in return. At present, the EU is readjusting its objectives in the future development of the Eastern Partnership to more clearly reflect the post-Vilnius reality. Willing and able partners like the Republic of Moldova need to be supported in their European path and shielded from outside pressures.

The EU must closely and consistently rely on its transatlantic partners as well, including Turkey, in pursuing our objectives for the Eastern Neighborhood. Strategic convergence needs to be better translated in cooperation on the ground.

There are major regional actors, including Turkey, with which the EU can do better in encouraging pragmatic, meaningful participation in consolidating the foundation of Eastern regional cooperation. Romania already has a substantial record and

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experience in this respect, from working in formats that we have developed over two decades in Southeast Europe and the Black Sea region. Turkey has traditionally been an honest and effective partner on such levels.

Romania truly believes that, based on mutually advantageous approaches, our two countries can renew efforts toward a stable and prosperous common neighborhood, in an overall spirit of European constructiveness and in the interest of stability, security, and prosperity of our regions.

For instance, energy is one field in which there is an important cooperation potential. In recent years, we have seen the topic of energy politics in the forefront of disputes in Eastern Europe. Access to energy and natural gas prices have been used for advancing state agendas without any regard for the people affected.

Turkey has a major role to play in any developments in the energy field. Its geographic proximity to both the Central Asian energy deposits and the European markets makes it the transit point for energy corridors going west. Thus, we can again call Turkey the land bridge between Asia and Europe.

Energy –and, more specifically, access to energy– is a double-edged sword that can both sustain democracy-building and create economic and regional rivalries at the same time. The struggle to combat energy poverty, offer equal and nondiscriminatory access to energy, and achieve competitiveness and economic growth for all stakeholders is a complex task that needs to be carefully handled.

This is the first idea that Europe needs to have in mind when applying its energy policies in the Eastern neighborhood. Connecting energy markets (including both consumers and producers) means connecting interests and benefits. This leads to burden-sharing and convergence. When Europe approaches the Eastern neighborhood, it should seek to balance strictly commercial aspects of its relationship with the region with cross-sector investments, so that its impact is a socio-economic one. This should further provide the conditions necessary to create long-term partnerships based on sound principles such as transparency, nondiscrimination, and predictability.

Turkey and Romania share important objectives in the Black Sea and the wider region around it, including Eastern Europe. By increasingly working together we can achieve our shared goal of having a stable and prosperous common neighborhood. The Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy are formats that can be used by our two countries to deepen our cooperation in the region.