

WHAT DOES SECURITY MEAN FOR ROMANIA?

This article elaborates on Romania's view on security, and the principles Romania wants to be included in NATO's New Strategic Concept. It is clear that old historical fears still influence Romania's foreign policy and its stand in the process of elaboration of NATO's New Strategic Concept. Security at the eastern border is of crucial importance for Romania. The same goes for the open doors policy, which Romania wants to be continued, even if Russia is, to say the least, not quite "at ease" with the idea of countries like Georgia or Ukraine being NATO members. Romania also insists on extending NATO partnerships to energy producing countries, such as those in Central Asia, and securing energy transport routes.

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On an emotional level, Romania has never forgotten the communist regime and the Cold War. Romanians used to say, during the communist era, that they were waiting for the Americans to come and save them from communism and Russia. After the revolution in 1989, becoming a NATO member state was the main priority of Romania's foreign policy and it received a large amount of public support.

NATO membership gave Romanians a sense of security they never experienced in the past and also a sense of pride and feeling of belonging to a community that was forbidden to them for years. This was a community observed and dreamed of behind the communist wall, a community built upon a set of values that post-revolutionary Romanians aspired to join. NATO membership meant not only being protected but also being recognized as a full-fledged democracy.

The trauma of those 50 years of communism, and a long history of Russian interference in Romania's internal affairs is still present in public memory. Although times have changed and Bucharest and Moscow are partners in the NATO-Russia Council and Romanian officials, including President Traian Basescu, often make public appeals to having a "pragmatic relationship" with the Russian Federation, nobody forgets that Russia is still nearby.

For Romania, Article 5 of NATO's New Strategic Concept is of utmost importance. The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Baconschi, has stated that for Romania today, this article is as important as ever.¹ "It is of utmost importance that Article 5 is kept as it is", Baconschi stated. He also insisted on the importance of collective defense. It is only natural that such statements come from the official of a country marred by historical traumas and foreign interventions.

Energy for Romania also constitutes a question of security. Energy is a subject mentioned by Romanian officials at almost every event, including international conferences related to NATO or covering the issue of security in general. Romanian authorities have suggested that NATO's role should be extended to fields such as energy security. As the State Secretary for Strategic Affairs, Bogdan Aurescu, has put it: "NATO should intensify its partnership policy to those countries that are energy producers, and the Alliance should not only protect the energy routes, but it should export security know-how to these countries that are sources of energy."² "Why protect the transport routes if there is no gas going through?" Aurescu continued in a recent interview with *Radio Romania*.

¹ The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Teodor Baconschi made this statement at a public debate in Bucharest on NATO's New Strategic Concept on 9 April 2010.

² Bogdan Aurescu, State Secretary for Strategic Affairs in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has made this statement in an interview for Radio Romania on 10 May 2010.

Russia becomes extra sensitive when the main topic of the talks is energy. In Moscow, NATO's expansion is already perceived as a threat. The diplomat, Bogdan Aurescu, has clarified Bucharest's position on the issue with the following words: "Of course Romania supports a pragmatic dialogue with Russia, and the activity of the NATO-Russia Council, but whatever the allies decide is their own business, and only member states have a veto on the issue of NATO being more involved in energy security, nobody from outside the Alliance has a say in that."³

It would seem that Romania somehow finds itself, similar to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe (such as Poland), supportive of the principles and issues that annoy Moscow, such as maintaining NATO's "open doors" policy. At a recent informal meeting, of the ministers of foreign affairs from NATO countries held in Tallinn, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Baconschi repeated Bucharest's message of support for Georgia and Ukraine in gaining membership to the Alliance, only "when they would have met all the necessary criteria."⁴

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Lately, Romania's relations with Georgia are getting closer, proof of which is the recent signing of a deal for gas transport between Romania, Georgia and Azerbaijan. It is no secret that relations with Ukraine are not as smooth as those with Georgia. Romania and Ukraine have a number of unsolved issues, yet Romanian officials never give up in arguing that Bucharest strongly supports Ukraine's accession to NATO.

The principle of collective defense, as well as the issue of NATO's anti-ballistic shield, are two points are often mentioned by the Romanian authorities. These points lie at the very core of any public discourse, including on the subject of NATO's anti-ballistic shield. Bucharest has always insisted on the existence of a shield that would cover the entire Europe – including Romanian territory. In a new plan proposed by U.S., Romania is expected to be involved in the second phase, meaning that it will host Standard Missile 3 type land interceptors, which will be operational starting with 2015.

³ Excerpt taken from the above cited statement.

⁴ Interview given by Teodor Baconschi, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to *Radio Romania* on 22 April 2010, after the informal summit of the ministers of foreign affairs from NATO countries.

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In the Romanian press and public opinion, being party to the anti-ballistic shield is probably considered the most important decision taken by Romania since the fall of communism. Surprisingly, Russia's reaction to the announcement was less aggressive than expected. There have been comparisons of this issue to Russia's reaction when Poland and the Czech Republic agreed with the U.S. on the installation of the American ballistic missile shield in their territory. In Bucharest, this was interpreted as a clear sign of change in Russian-American relations – a change from which Romania has only to benefit.

When Romania accepted Obama administration's proposal to host the American anti-ballistic shield, President Traian Basescu made it very clear that the shield is not installed against Russia. Basescu stated that "categorically Romania would not host any system directed against Russia, but its purpose is protection from other threats."⁵

When asked, if Romania has reasons to fear a missile attack from Iran, Romanian diplomats state that such is not the issue, and argue that the real issue is all about collective defense. According to the diplomats, all NATO members should be able to benefit from the protection offered by the anti-ballistic shield. And when Russia is mentioned as a potential member of this shield, official statements from Romania, were, so far, not downright opposed to the idea, but at the same time less than enthusiastic. The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Baconschi, has recently stated that Bucharest hopes that a clear decision on the subject of NATO's anti-ballistic shield will be adopted at the Lisbon Summit, together with NATO's new strategic concept.

From the Romanian perspective, NATO membership offers great benefits, both in terms of collective defense and security, and democracy. Nevertheless, in evaluating Romania's membership to NATO, different dynamics need to be taken into consideration. This article has attempted to name some of these dynamics and offer an analysis on the sorts of discussions NATO membership instigates within Romanian political circles.

⁵ Public statement of the Romanian President Traian Basescu on 3 February 2010.