

WHY ROMANIA IS A NATO “MODEL ALLY”?

NATO's eastward expansion was a fundamental geopolitical process that allowed countries to be prepared for the worst, the Russian revanche, by pursuing the best, the most successful path for democracy. Romania, which emerged from the tremendous communist Ceausescu regime, strongly wanted NATO membership and, after the first encouraging meetings in 1990, officially entered in 2004. However, Romania has been already back then contributed to many Western missions. Due to its geographical position, Romania is central to all NATO objectives. Now, Romania and Poland are the pivots of NATO's defensive complex in the “post-soviet space”: Poland protects the Baltic Sea, Romania the Black Sea, where the Russian old-imperial appetites remain; Romania still defends the precious grain corridor. Furthermore, Romania is a “model ally”. There is a solid pro-Atlantic and pro-American sentiment in the country.

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The fall of the Soviet Union ushered in a new and positive phase for all the countries of the so-called “New Europe,” which had been subjected to the heavy yoke of the Warsaw Pact and which wanted to return to the Western camp to which they felt they wanted to belong. The promise of freedom, rights, and security justified the collective efforts. At the time, Romania, a country that has always been linked to Western culture, was in precarious conditions: it was the only country where a Stalinist regime had remained standing while the other nations had launched timid reforms; the economic and productive Romanian system was in shambles. Romania had to free itself through a bloody revolution. So, constructing a democratic system was even more complicated: in any case, those who led that process knew what they were leaving behind.

The months and years that followed were very turbulent. After the communist regime's collapse, the country also had to manage the internal ethnic conflict, as in the case of Transylvania, where the Hungarian minority claimed the rights that the communist regime had always denied them. Only the army's intervention managed to keep the factions separate, avoiding the worst. In parallel with the opening of the economy, Romania approached the Atlantic Alliance. NATO membership was not a move against Russia, it was a way of belonging to the Western world. Although it took a long time, about 14 years after the end of the regime, Romania achieved the two objectives that all post-Ceausescu governments had set themselves: achieving a membership from both NATO and the European Union.

Unfortunately, the revanchist specter has re-emerged in Russia and found vent in Putin's authoritarian leadership. For this reason, the accession of the countries of the former Warsaw Pact to NATO remains a guarantee of security and stability for the whole world. All these countries have had to “cross the desert”: to reform and restructure the economy, they have paid a high price, but none has turned back or intends to relive the climate of the Iron Curtain. In short, there has been tangible progress in history for many people, who are now free, but history is neither linear nor always has the same time for everyone, so Russia has been going backward.

The Relevance of Romania: a Bulwark in the East and in the Black Sea

Romania is an essential component of NATO's defensive system: it ensures a presence in the critical scenario of the Black Sea, and guarantees projection in many strategic areas, like the Balkans or the Middle East; so, together with Poland², became a primary defensive bulwark. NATO has identified Romania and Poland, nations similar in terms of territory and population, as the two main defensive bastions on the East flank: the air defence shield has been deployed in Poland, the

anti-missile shield in Romania, which guarantees a broad range of coverage against external threats; in addition, both countries have airbases that can accommodate F35s.

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The importance of Romania for NATO – also for the rest of the world – in the Black Sea³ scenario has plastically emerged with the corridor for grain (the deal will expire in May) protected by the port of Constance where the Samp/T systems are located and where are NATO warships. Romania has already helped Ukraine in the export of grain with the system of ports of the lower Danube⁴ bypassing the Russian blockade in front of Odesa. As the great historic Fernand Braudel⁵ wrote, the Mediterranean is a “sea made of seas” and a “sea between seas”: so, the security of the Atlantic depends also on the Black Sea – the Kara Deniz for the Ottomans – protection. Meanwhile, the Romanian navy, together with the Turkish and Bulgarian ones, keeps the sea safe with regular demining operations.

Not only that, but Romania is also a very reliable ally. In Romania, there is a strong pro-American and Atlanticist sentiment also due to the country’s cultural roots that link it to Roman civilization and the French Republic. There is no sympathy for Russia, there are no political forces openly close to Russia, and nobody would ever want to go back. Indeed, Romania was also the least Russophile country during the USSR.

NATO After Ukraine

No room for a Manichaeian view of war here; there is a victim that NATO is right to protect, and there is an aggressor that has made poor military and economic calculations. There is no justification for the aggression. The fact that millions of Russians now live in countries other than Russia because of the collapse of the Soviet Union is not an excuse. After all, there is also a Russian minority in Estonia, which remained there after the end of the USSR, but has preferred the path of freedom.

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By coming to Ukraine's aid, NATO has disproved skeptics and showed that it is, in fact, alive and growing. After being halted by the brave Ukrainian resistance and falling deeper into trouble, Russia now faces a more unified and powerful great wall than ever before, stretching from Finland to Türkiye. After failing to interfere in 2014, NATO finally did so in 2022, at which point it also strengthened itself.

While NATO has made great strides in recent years, it is still primarily a defensive alliance led by the United States. Given the potential for divergent interests between the United States and Europe and the complexity of potential threats, a military-only approach may not be adequate. Europe must become aware of the fact that it cannot continue to depend on the United States for its defence and must launch a programme for European security.

The time has come for NATO to choose a new secretary general, and while the odds favor a candidate from the "New Europe" rather than the Scandinavian countries, the weight of Boris Johnson's nomination as the man who wrote "the dream of Rome" hangs over the entire process.

China: A Global Competitor But Also An Actor With Whom to Dialogue

One point that NATO must analyse is its relationship with China. Romania has had political and cultural ties with China since the Cultural Revolution of 1968; the rapprochement with China allowed Romania to move away from Russia by attempting an autonomous route. Unlike Russia, China is much more solid and more organized. China has accomplished something incredible in a short time: an economic and social miracle that lifted millions of people out of poverty in a very short time. It is a more unique than rare case in the history of the world. China is more of an economic and technological competitor than an adversary. China is in a quandary with Russia, but China also has great potential. China can continue to play a global peace-making role, as demonstrated by brokering the deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia.