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Donald Trump's electoral victory took the entire world by surprise. In the countries on NATO's eastern flank in particular, Baltic and Black Sea countries, Trump's election is worrisome for the public opinion. Not because of the surprising way in which the White House leader expresses himself, but rather because of his friendly statements about Russia and its president, Vladimir Putin. The Baltic countries, which are in the first line of fire, but also Poland and Romania, look to the United States as the guarantor of their security. At this point, however, they are faced with a president who criticizes his own country's security establishment and is laudatory when it comes to the Kremlin leader. He also sees NATO as an obsolete and inefficient organization, considers the US just as immoral as Russia is (as he said in a Fox News interview). Therefore, political and military leaders in Central Europe are wondering whether they can rely on the United States or not, and if their membership in the North Atlantic organization, and even their Strategic Partnership with the US, can still guarantee their security. President Trump not only generates confusion but also undermines the Wilsonian order that has been providing peace, security and prosperity in Europe for over half a century.

Of the eastern flank countries, Romania is geographically the closest to the Crimean Peninsula, annexed by Vladimir Putin, and eastern Ukraine, destabilized by Russia. It is no surprise, then, that for most Romanian experts the greatest threat to security is the eventual presence of Russia north of the Danube Delta, in the region of Odessa, as a neighbour on NATO's and EU's border. As Romania alone cannot cope with this threat, considering the signals that the US might disengage from the region, the political elites in Bucharest have few options available. The most important is identifying a new ally to guarantee Romania's security, integrity and independence, considering the shift in American foreign policy priorities. In order to gain time and reduce risks, Bucharest may try to mend relations with Budapest and Moscow. Nothing new in this, there have been several other such moments throughout history. Not even the "Budapest-Moscow" axis is something new.

However, it is by no means obvious that Romania has any alternative to NATO and the Strategic Partnership with the US. What can it do other than bank on its proverbial luck?!

Even if it invested human and intellectual resource, Romanian diplomacy would still not gain much in its relationship with Moscow in 2017. First of all because of the negative passivity of the last two decades and a half[1]. Add to this a difficult historical inheritance: territorial disputes involving a large part of the Republic of Moldova, as well as parts of Ukraine, which acquired the territories of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina after the 1940 annexations; the Romanian treasury which was sent for safekeeping in Moscow in 1916-1917 and never fully recovered; moral compensation through a clear condemnation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939). The territorial dispute was never fully contested by Bucharest officially, while Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova were recognized by Romania with their current borders as of 1991, the moment the USSR collapsed, thus confirming the frontiers drawn by Stalin. Only a few small, but very vocal, organizations, are still contesting today Romania's eastern frontiers, proposing a revisionist agenda. The second issue: Romania's treasury was mentioned in a letter signed jointly by the foreign ministers, when the basic political treaty was signed between the two countries, Romania and Russia, on 4 July 2003. The problem was relegated to historians and archivists, who formed a committee to discuss controversial issues in bilateral relations. The committee has met three times so far, last time in Sinaia, Romania, in March 2016. The pact between Hitler and Stalin was mentioned in the letter of the foreign ministers, alongside Marshal Ion Antonescu's anti-Soviet campaign. Strangely, the text of the letter does not establish a causal link between the two events.

Missing three out of three targets is an "accomplishment" that is hard to explain. Other former socialist countries also had sensitive situations related to common history, but they managed them in a completely different manner.

Always in Counterstep

Over the last 27 years, Bucharest has most of the time been in counterstep with general developments. For instance, in April 1991, Romania signed The Treaty on Cooperation, Good Neighbourly Relations and Friendship

[1] Vasile Buga, Iulian Chifu, *România-Rusia: intrarea în normalitate*, Casa NATO, București, 2003; В.Б. Кириллов, И.С. Путинцев, "Отношения России и Румынии после 1989 года в контексте внешнеполитических приоритетов двух стран", *Вестник МГИМО*, 07.05.2012, pp. 13-23; Sergiu Celac, Dan Dungaciu, "Romanian-Russian Relations since 1989", in Valentin Naumescu, Dan Dungaciu (eds.), *The European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood Today. Politics, Dynamics, Perspectives*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2015, pp 325-356. Both Viktor Kirillov, Igor Putintsev' article and Sergiu Celac, Dan Duganciu' article were re-published in vol. *Russia and East Central Europe after the Cold War: A Fundamentally Transformed Relationship*, ed. by Andrei Zagorski, Human Rights Publishers, Prague, 2015. pp. 291-322, 323-360.

between Romania and the USSR, which fell apart a few months later[2]. While George Bush Jr. was looking with admiration deep into Putin's soul, Romanian president Traian Băsescu referred to the Black Sea as a "Russian lake". And while Central European countries were "resetting" their relations with Russia, following the Barack Obama model, Bucharest and Moscow were feverishly expelling each other's diplomats, having reached a peak of tension in their bilateral relations. The highest number of expulsions (May 2009, August 2010), displaying unprecedented scale[3], occurred precisely in a period of political openness by the Kremlin, during president Dmitri Medvedev's term.

Bilateral relation thawed only when a new government, led by Victor Ponta, was sworn in 2012. That is the year when Putin was back in the Kremlin for a third term. Right away, the level and intensity of bilateral contacts increased. Paradoxically, while Russia's relations with the US and EU states began to cool and Western ambassadors were physically harassed in the streets of Moscow, the government in Bucharest was working to relaunch the bilateral relationship. As usual, Romania was out of step. In preparation for premier Ponta's visit to Moscow, scheduled for the summer of 2014, foreign minister Titus Corlățean went, in July 2013, on an unusually long visit to Russia's capital, two and a half days, which the hosts described as "historic". Minister Sergei Lavrov announced the dawn of a new era in bilateral relations[4]. At the last moment, however, the occupation and annexation of Crimea as well as international sanctions forced the government in Bucharest to step back and follow the policy that had been set by its allies, NATO and the EU. After the confusion of the past few months, Romanian diplomacy got its marching orders from Brussels: do not recognize the annexation of Crimea and maintain sanctions imposed on Russia until it gets out of Crimea and pulls out from Donbass.

In the last few years, after the crisis broke out, Romania has scarcely featured in president's Putin's public speeches, or in those of his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov. In fact, Moscow does not see Romania as an autonomous international actor for Russia to negotiate with. References to it

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2 Armand Goșu, "Sur le poids de l'histoire: Les relations de la Roumanie avec l'Est", *Geopolitique*, no. 90. avril-juillet 2005, pp. 48-58.

3 "Spionii români deconspiraţi – uitaţi înainte de a deveni legende", 17 august 2010, http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/spionii-romani-deconspirati-uitati-inainte-de-a-deveni-legende-6925112 (accessed 10 Dec. 2016).

4 "Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел России С.В. Лаврова в ходе совместной пресс-конференции по итогам переговоров с Министром иностранных дел Румынии Т. Корлэцяном, Москва, 9 июля 2013 год", http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news//asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/102558, (accessed 10 Aug. 2013); "Întrevederea ministrului Titus Corlățean cu omologul rus, Serghei Lavrov", 09.07.2013, http://mae.ro/node/20818 (accessed 10 Aug. 2013); Armand Goșu, "Titus Corlățean la Moscova", *Revista 22*, vol. XXIV, no. 1217, 16-22 iulie 2013.

have been mostly in relation to the American anti-ballistic defense system[5], which was taken under the NATO umbrella at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. According to the Kremlin, Romania became a legitimate target for Russia because it is hosting elements of the system at the base in Deveselu, thus upseting the strategic balance. As Russian-American relations resettle, even if the US gives up on installing the last pylon in Poland, it is highly unlikely, but not impossible, for Washington to abandon the functional structure in Deveselu, even if legally it is managed by NATO. Deveselu is a resource for the US in its relations with Russia, which enhances Romania's strategic value due to the fact that it is hosting the base on its territory. Paradoxically, as long as Romania is not an autonomous actor promoting its own agenda, but one simply adapting its foreign agenda depending on the general and regional balance of forces, Deveselu is a guarantee that a revision of Russian-American relations would not leave Romania out of this process; so Bucharest has a lever for influence, albeit the only one, in Washington through the Pentagon[6].

Domestic Obstacles

Domestic obstacles in the way of relaunching relations between Bucharest and Moscow have proven more difficult. Any public discussion on relations with Moscow is likely to stir strong emotions and polarize the electorate. One may identify a Russophobic current as a holdover from the 19th century, a component of Romanian national consciousness, which acquired racist aspects under national-communism, in spite of the fact that Russian troops had pulled out of Romania in 1958, Russian language was removed from Romanian schools as an compulsory subject, and the Kremlin had no hand in the dramatic economic and social crisis that Romania was thrown in by Nicolae Ceaușescu in the 1980s. After December 1989, the opposition accused Ion Iliescu's National Salvation Front, the predecessor to today's Social Democratic Party (SDP), in the early days after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, of having surreptitious ties with Mikhail Gorbachev's Soviet Communist Party. So far,

[5] "Путин: в ПРО в Румынии могут быть помещены ударные комплексы", 27.05.2016, https://ria.ru/world/20160527/1440155940.html (accessed 10 Dec. 2016); "MAE își exprimă surprinderea față de poziția președintelui Rusiei cu privire la sistemul de apărare antirachetă de la Deveselu", 28.05.2016, http://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2016/05/28/mae-isi-exprima-surprinderea-fata-de-pozitia-presedintelui-rusiei-cu-privire-la-sistemul-de-aparare-antiracheta-de-la-deveselu-14-28-38 (accessed 10 Dec. 2016).

[6] Valentin Naumescu, "Este într-adevăr posibilă o negociere Trump-Putin pe sistemul antirachetă din România și Polonia?", 6 ianuarie 2017, http://www.contributors.ro/global-europa/este-intr-adevar-posibila-o-negociere-trump-putin-pe-sistemul-antiracheta-din-romania-și-polonia/ (accessed 6 Jan. 2017).

there has not been a single election campaign in which the SDP was not accused of improper ties to Russia. Since there has been no substantial proof of that, this seems to be the price paid by the Social Democrats for encouraging a dialogue with Russia, while the parties on the right demanded "moral satisfaction", "reparatory gestures" from Moscow for past Soviet actions that were harmful to Romania's interests.

Due to public opinion sensitivities, working contacts are maintained in a twilight, precisely in order to avoid scandals in the press, easily sparked by any topic related to Russia, which has hindered the running of bilateral projects. Unfortunately, this situation deprives the Romanian establishment of serious debates regarding the opportunity of signing certain documents or collaboration on certain issues. There is a long tradition of secrecy in the relationship with Moscow, from the April 1991 treaty signed by Iliescu and Gorbachev, down to the complete discretion over the Russian Science and Culture Center, which was inaugurated on 15 May 2015, in a sumptuous building about 100 meters away from the Romanian government headquarters.

Economic Relations

The main argument brought by those who militate for dialing down Romanian-Russian relations is the high trade deficit. Things, however, are not at all dramatic; Romania is in a much better situation than the states around it, first and foremost because it does not depend on importing energy from Russia. Little or nothing is being said about Russian investment in Romania. Officially, there are around 100 joint companies with significant Russian capital. During the various stages of privatization in Romania, Russian industrialists have made serious purchases in the steel industry, metals, chemical industry, refineries and oil equipment manufactoring. Many large Russian companies are present in Romania, such as Lukoil, Gazprom, Russkyi Aluminyi, TMK, etc. Officially, Russian investments stand at over $2 billion. Lukoil and Gazprom Neft own a total of around 450 gas stations, and hold several concession contracts for oil and gas extraction on-shore and in the Black Sea continental shelf[7].

The largest volume of trade was registered in 2008, when it exceeded $5.9 billion, of which Russian exports, over 90% oil and gas, accounted for around $5 billion. The economic crisis, then the sanctions, caused a reduction in bilateral trade, so that in 2015 the amount of trade was only $3.3 billion, of which $2.2 were Russian exports. The new structure of bilateral trade also reflects the lower consumption of Russian gas, which went down from 6 billion cubic meters per year before the economic crisis to 0.2 billion cubic meters in 2015.

[7] "Российско-румынские торгово-экономические отношения", http://romania.mid.ru/70 (accessed 10 Dec. 2016).

As a point of comparison, Poland[8] and Bulgaria[9], for instance, which are dependent on energy imports from Russia, have higher volumes of trade. In 2012, trade between Bulgaria and Russia amounted to $7.35 billion, of which $6.63 billion were Russian exports (oil and gas accounted for over 92% of this amount). That same year, the volume of trade between Romania and Russia was $4.42 billion, of which $3.07 billion were Russian exports and $1.35 billion were imports from Romania, compared to a mere $720 million worth of Bulgarian goods exported to Russia that same year.

In turn, Poland in 2013 had a trade volume of $28 billion with Russia, of which almost 20 billion Russian exports, with an overwhelming 90%+ in energy resources. Russia is second only to Germany as an economic partner of Poland. In spite of what politicians and institutions claim, the Romanian-Russian trade and economic relations are substantial, the trade balance more even. The most important aspect, however, is the fact that Romania is the least dependent on Russian oil and gas of all the Central and Eastern European countries. Therefore it is hard to identify a special economic and trade interest as the main engine for Bucharest in relaunching relations with Russia.

What to Do?

Trump's accession to the White House and his apparent abandonment of a hard-line approach in relation to Moscow has reopened the discussion on Russia, seen as a threat to Romania's security, which Bucharest believed was safeguarded by the Strategic Partnership with the United States. This being the case, Bucharest has at least two moves available: consolidating its relationship with Berlin, the main anti-revisionist actor in Europe, and improving relations with Budapest, but most especially with Moscow. From the grassroots up, no movement can be seen on either of these fronts.

The political relationship with Russia of late has been reduced to identifying the graves of Romanian soldiers who fought in WWII, according to the agreement on the legal status of military graves, signed on 8 November 2005. The political dialogue was limited to the level of Foreign Ministry directors general, the latest meeting dating back to May 2015. The latest meeting of the Romanian-Russian Intergovernmental Committee took place in April 2013 in Bucharest.

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[8] "Россия – Польша. Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество", http://poland.mid.ru/torgovo-ekonomiceskoe-sotrudnicestvo (accessed 10 Dec. 2016).

[9] "О торгово-экономических отношениях России с Болгарией", http://bulgaria.mid.ru/ekonomika (accessed 10 Dec. 2016).

The Social Democratic Party and its junior partner in the ruling coalition, the Liberal-Democratic Alliance, does not have any plans to go further than that. In its governing platform, it mentioned that stability in the eastern area is fundamental, in order for Romania to prevent "becoming a state with a direct border with Russia". As for the bilateral relation, the platform speaks of "pragmatic and predictable" relations with Russia, their intensity depending on Russia's attitude in solving the Ukrainian conflict and in "restoring the strategic balance in the eastern neighbourhood", "observing international commitments" made by Russia, as "an absolutely necessary condition for enhancing the dialogue". In terms of enhancing economic relations, an obsession for most Romanian governments after December 1989, that would be achieved "with strict and active observance of the regime of sanctions imposed by the EU, which must continue until a solution is reached in the crisis in Ukraine". As for the Crimean Peninsula, Bucharest assures Kiev, in the Governing Platform, that Romania would not recognize its illegal annexation by Russia[10].

One important question arises. What could explain the cold tone taken in the governing platform? The SDP has so far had a more relaxed attitude, rather open in relation to Russia. Why this change of tone? In addition to the crisis caused by the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass, the top leadership of the SDP no longer comprises the old team put together by former premier Adrian Năstase, who regarded the relationship with Russia as a priority.

The new foreign minister, Teodor Meleșcanu, during his expert committee hearing in Parliament, referred to the re-militarization of Crimea as a "game changer" which modified dramatically the strategic balance in the Black Sea area[11]. The relationship with Russia was not seen as a priority for his office. In addition, Mr. Meleșcanu's personal history does not help in relation to Russia. Documents in the Russian Foreign Ministry record the fact that, in April 1996, he met his Russian counterpart, Yevgheny Primakov, on the tarmac of the Otopeni Airport in Bucharest, telling him that his visit to Bucharest was pointless since the signing of the basic political treaty had been canceled. Based on what Minister Meleșcanu said during Parliament hearings, when he insisted on reinvigorating bilateral diplomacy, it is probable that the Romanian Foreign Ministry will propose a resumption of political consultations with Moscow. The last such consultations were held in May 2015. Most likely, Russia will accept a resumption of the political dialogue at the level of directors general, most likely to grow more intense in the next few years. Also in 2017, the 12th meeting of the

[10] "Programul de guvernare, 2017-2020", București, 2017, http://gov.ro/fisiere/pagini_fisiere/Programul_de_guvernare_2017-2020.pdf (accessed 10 Jan. 2017).

[11] "Nici măcar Marea Neagră nu mai e un bun vecin", http://www.ziuaconstanta.ro/stiri/politic/teodor-melescanu-la-audierile-din-parlament-nici-macar-marea-neagra-nu-mai-e-un-bun-vecin-619577.html (accessed 5 Jan. 2017).

Russian-Romanian Intergovernmental Committee for Economic Cooperation could be held, but a decision to this end will be made not earlier than this coming summer in Bucharest, depending on the status of international sanctions against Russia.

The Lessons of History

Romania has been here before, having to change the way it approaches Russia. Before WWI, during the period of neutrality, through French diplomatic channels, Bucharest relaunched the relationship with the Russian Empire, mainly because it responded to a demand from its main ally, France. Also, in 1939-1941, through German diplomatic channels, Bucharest and Moscow lent slightly more weight to bilateral relations, because it was in Hitler's interest. In both cases, the "go-between", be it France or Germany, played the central role, operating a change in the foreign relations paradigm, controlling the Romanian-Russian and Romanian-Soviet relationship, respectively, to their own ends, those of Paris or Berlin.

Just like in 1914 or 1940, Romania will be able to relaunch its bilateral relationship with Russia taking advantage of the services of an interested partner. Right now, Romania's ally is the United States. Which, however, has just begun a process of reassessing its own relationship with Russia. To which the relationship between Bucharest and Moscow will be germane. Until the White House establishes what it may want from the Kremlin, Bucharest would do well to prepare for a variety of scenarios.

I was mentioning above the fact that for Romania, Germany may be the only plausible alternative to the US, a fact that has probably been taken in consideration[12]. However, there are no signs yet that Berlin is interested in being involved in regional policy on Bucharest's side, which it views with distrust; at the same time, Romania's traditional advantages are no more, namely petroleum and grain. In turn, France, itself politically and militarily diminished, looks at Romania with a lack of interest without precedent in modern and contemporary history. Given all this, the US, in spite of its apparent availability to make new security arrangements with Russia, remains Romania's security anchor. This may result in Romania's having to improve its relationship with Russia in order to make sure that the partnership with the US will continue, just as it happened before in diplomatic history, in 1914 and 1940; except that at those times Romania's backers were France or Germany. Today it is the United States playing that role.

[12] Armand Goșu, Octavian Manea, "Letter from Bucharest", July 10, 2015, http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=60668 (accessed 10 Dec. 2016).