

Third Energy Package to South Stream. This is understandable, as both measures would benefit consumer nations like Bulgaria. Bulgaria is also looking forward to increased gas extraction from its Black Sea continental shelf, and in anticipation of this pressured Gazprom for a more flexible agreement on periods, volumes and prices for Russian gas.

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Russia is adept at exploiting its historical links with Bulgaria to promote its trade and investment. However, Russia's position is not invariably strong, and the Borisov government had managed to pick and choose between Russian energy projects, whilst protecting the national interest. A period of prolonged instability may undermine this fragile achievement.

ANALYSIS

Still Talking Past Each Other: Romanian–Russian Relations

By Simona R. Soare, Bucharest

Abstract

The Romanian–Russian relationship can be characterized as functioning according to a strained dynamic, which occasionally escalates to outright tension. This dynamic is the product of deep historical and geopolitical factors. The gradual normalization of their bilateral relationship is proving a slow and difficult process due to mutually hostile perceptions and seeming politically-incompatible national interests.

Nearly two decades after the Cold War, the Romanian–Russian relationship continues to be strained, and occasionally tense. The causes for this are both historical and geo-political. On the one hand, Romanians—like most Central and Eastern Europeans—are suspicious of Russia as a consequence of the recent history of rocky relations with Moscow. Since Romania's independence in 1878, Russia has occupied Romanian territory repeatedly; participated in every partition of Romanian national territory; and Moscow strongly interfered in Romanian political and domestic affairs during the Cold War. Hence, it is not surprising that Romanians are weary of Moscow's intentions towards them. At the same time, Russia is suspicious of Romania's close strategic partnership with the United States; its support for Moldova's accelerated transition to democracy and its accession to the EU; its support for EU and NATO democratization and defense reform projects (the Black Sea Synergy, the Eastern Partnership, IPAP); its participation in the dissolution of enduring regional orders beneficial to Russia (the Montreux Convention); its anti-Russian stance on energy issues; and its hosting new American military projects, such as the anti-ballistic missile system in Europe. The 2008 Russian–Georgian war reminded Romania—and the rest of its Central and

Eastern European allies—of the need to lay down red lines beyond which the West should not tolerate Russian assertiveness and aggression. This event also convinced Bucharest and its Central and Eastern allies that their relations with Russia continued to be informed by balance of power logics. The return of Putin to the Presidency has only consolidated these perceptions.

The Sinuous Development of a Strained Relationship

During the early 1990s, Romanian–Russian relations were characterized by strategic ambivalence, with Romania thrown into Europe's grey area of instability and conflict after the Cold War, and in response urgently searching for strong security guarantees. In 1991 Romania was the only post-Communist state that signed a bilateral treaty on economic and technical-scientific relations with the USSR. However, this treaty was never ratified as the USSR was dissolved later that same year. The fast-declining USSR was a feeble shadow of its former self by 1990–1, but Romania nonetheless remained committed to the Warsaw Pact until 1991, when the USSR was eventually dissolved. The troubled Russian Federation, however, was in no position to extend the same security guarantees that the USSR had provided

to its smaller allies. This, along with political considerations, led Romania to officially declare, in 1993, its desire to join NATO and EU to consolidate its precarious national security. In an effort to reassure its former ally, Romania and Russia signed a treaty concerning bilateral military cooperation in 1994 and agreed to continue negotiations on the signing of the bilateral treaty on good-neighborly relations. Despite these efforts, bilateral relations quickly deteriorated.

By 2000, Romanian-Russian relations had entered a new stage of development, becoming increasingly strained and tense. Since 1993 when Romania embarked on a path towards NATO and EU accession, Bucharest, like other Central Europeans, sought to dissociate itself from its former Cold War ally. In April 1996, the Romanian-Russian relationship experienced one of its tensest moments, as the Russian Prime Minister flew to Bucharest at the invitation of Romanian authorities to sign a renegotiated version of the bilateral good-neighborly relations treaty. As the Russian PM's plane touched down in Bucharest, the newly-elected Romanian president, Emil Constantinescu announced that Romania would refuse to sign the treaty, because it failed to address two of the most enduring bilateral disputes between the two countries: Romania decried the treaty's lack of clauses that condemned the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (1939) and that would establish a clear roadmap for the return of Romania's National Treasure stored in Moscow. Russia furiously denounced Romanian intentions as hostile and driven by irredentist inclinations towards territories within the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, to which Moscow considered Romania might lay claim. Also, Russia complained that Romania refused to include a provision that would commit the two parties not to join alliances that are targeted against the other.

Following this episode, all bilateral diplomatic visits were canceled. They were not renewed until 2003 and this resumption of high-level diplomatic visits was achieved with a great deal of difficulty. This resumption did not, however, set in motion a balanced diplomatic relationship, rather a non-reciprocal dynamic, whereby there have been two visits by the Romanian Heads of State to Moscow between 1996-2007, but no Russian Head of State has visited Romania since 1989; PM Vladimir Putin came to Bucharest in 2008 to participate in the NATO Summit, and while he briefly met the Romanian president this hardly qualifies as a state visit. There have also been three visits of the Romanian Prime Minister to Moscow in 1996-2003, and only one by the Russian Prime Minister to Bucharest during the same timeframe.

By the mid-2000s, a third window of opportunity to normalize relations opened as a result of the 2000 Roma-

nian elections, which saw the Social-Democrat Party (PSD), erroneously considered to be closer to Moscow than other Romanian political parties, return to power. Eventually, in 2003, the bilateral treaty on good-neighborly relations was signed, but without addressing any of the contentious issues between the two parties: the condemnation of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the return of Romania's national treasure, and the provision concerning the parties' commitment not to participate in alliances that are targeted against the other. Not only did the signing of this treaty lead to serious criticism from Romanian opposition parties, but it did not serve to improve bilateral relations, as it did not lead to any substantial follow-up or political trust-building measures.

In April 2004 bilateral relations entered yet another phase of development, with Romania joining NATO (and later, in 2007, the EU). Since then political relations have been increasingly strained, with only a couple of high-level visits by Romanian Ministers to Moscow and only one return Russian visit, by Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, in 2005. Since 2009, political relations seem to have come to a complete standstill. During this period, the development of bilateral relations has been obstructed by several moments of elevated tension. In the second half of 2008, relations became fractious due to the Russian-Georgian war, with Bucharest demanding, alongside other Central Europeans, the condemnation of Russian aggression in Georgia. Just a few months later, in April 2009, another tense moment occurred in relation to the failed revolution in Moldova. In February 2010, upon the announcement that Romania had agreed to host components of Washington's European anti-ballistic missile system, relations with Russia took another turn towards the inimical. All of the above means that, more than two decades since the collapse of the USSR, bilateral relations between Romania and Russia continue to be plagued by a long list of controversial issues. The most prominent issues concern Moldova, the Romanian National Treasure, Romania's promotion of democracy and the EU/NATO in Eastern Europe, the US Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense System in Europe and energy security.

The Republic of Moldova

The most enduring issue of contention between Bucharest and Moscow is their opposing positions on the Republic of Moldova. More specifically, Moscow is concerned that Romania is developing a privileged strategic relationship with Moldova. Bucharest's policy towards Chişinău has often been called "one nation, two countries," although Romanian authorities rarely refer to it as such. Romania has highly vested interests in the acceleration of Chişinău's accession to the EU, in its accel-

erated modernization through democratization and in developing close educational and cultural ties with Moldova. Also, Bucharest has been a strong supporter of Moldova's territorial integrity and the withdrawal of Russian troops stationed in Transnistria ever since the early 1990s.

By contrast, Russia considers Moldova to be a part of its sphere of influence and, according to its near abroad strategy, is intent on maintaining pro-Russian political forces in power in Chişinău. The Kremlin is seriously perturbed by Romania's support for the democratization, modernization and EU approximation of the Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, Moscow suspects Romania might have revisionist intentions towards Bessarabia, which before June 1940 was a Romanian province that the USSR seized as part of the secret annexes of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact. This clause is one of the reasons why Russia refused to denounce the Pact in the 2003 bilateral treaty with Romania. Typically, Russia invokes Romania's support for the Moldovan authorities during their war against the separatist forces in Tiraspol in 1990–1992, as well as the alleged Romanian hand in the failed 2009 revolution in Moldova, as examples of Romania's presumed revisionism. Bucharest has repeatedly denied that it has any revisionist ambitions, and that it had any involvement in the 2009 events in Chişinău.

Unfortunately, Russia is not alone in harboring these suspicions about Romanian intentions towards Moldova. Austria, too entertains such suspicions; while Germany insisted upon the signing of a Romanian–Moldovan border treaty as reassurance. Moreover, a non-Romanian was consciously chosen as the EU representative for Moldova; Romania was deliberately excluded from the 5+2 framework for negotiating a solution to the Transnistria conflict, as it was claimed that it was “too closely involved” in the matter and because the Russian authorities and the Transnistrian representatives were opposed to its participation.

Bucharest considers these claims and suspicions to be exaggerated, completely unfounded and unproven. The Romanian authorities have shown no sign of diverting from their original 1991 policy course, which recognizes the independence of the Republic of Moldova. Indeed, Romania was the first state to recognize Moldova's independence. Moreover, within the EU, as well as in the case of the 5+2 format, Romania has not sought a greater role or influence on monitoring the security situation in Moldova or in negotiating a settlement for the Transnistrian conflict. Nor has Bucharest expressed dissatisfaction that it has been overlooked in these matters.

Furthermore, in 2010, the Romanian government pledged approximately €100 million in aid and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to help Moldova over-

come the negative effects of the global economic crisis. However, the pro-Russian political opposition in Chişinău, seeking to encourage Moldova to move away from the EU and closer to the Eurasian Union (EUA), was critical about the Romanian aid initiative and its assumed ulterior political agenda. Similarly, joint energy projects between Romania and Moldova have become stalled over the past couple of years for reasons that remain uncertain. Romania's policy of awarding citizenship to Moldovans was also an important point of disagreement between Chişinău, Moscow and Bucharest during 2010–2012. In 2007–2008, Chişinău, Moscow and Bucharest were involved in a mild disagreement about the official language of Moldova, as the Moldovan Communist Party argued that Moldovan law had established Moldovan—not Romanian, which was said to be entirely different—as the national language; a Moldovan–Romanian dictionary was issued to consolidate the differentiation. In response, Bucharest emphasized that Moldovan is a dialect of the Romanian language, but that Chişinău may call it whatever it wants. Moreover, although Romania and Moldova signed, under Western pressure, a border treaty in 2010, this treaty has produced further friction between Romania and Moldova, with the latter accusing Romania of stalling the ratification process. Thus, Romania–Moldovan relations remain complicated, with Moscow's support for pro-Russian political faction in Chişinău a source of irritation to Bucharest.

Romanian National Treasure

One of the most enduring controversies in the Romanian–Russian bilateral relationship is that of the status of the Romanian National Treasure. Some 94 tons of gold worth €2.45 billion, along with old manuscripts concerning the history and identity of the Romanian people, were sent to Moscow for safekeeping during World War I. However, not all of these national treasures have been returned yet, and Bucharest suspects Russia no longer wants to return them. Ever since the Cold War, Russia has claimed that the issue of the Romanian national treasure was a closed political matter. Within their negotiations on the return of these items, Romania's initiatives have not always been timely or properly followed through, while Moscow has been very slow at responding to the Romanian initiatives. Up till now, Moscow has made three shipments of the items it received from Romania during World War I, in 1935, 1956 and 2008. In 2012, Russia donated to the Romanian Academy, the complete manuscripts of Dimitrie Cantemir that detail the ancient history of the Romanian people. These manuscripts are believed to be a part of the national treasures that Romania sent to Moscow in 1916, and the

Russian gesture was well-received by the Romanian authorities. There are unconfirmed claims that Russia may have contacted the Romanian authorities through private ventures or Swiss banks to negotiate a bargain concerning the return of the treasure, but these reports do not seem credible.

Aside from the positive dynamic surrounding the donation of Dimitrie Cantemir manuscript, there has been little progress towards resolving the dispute. Indeed, this issue obstructed the signing of the long-discussed bilateral treaty on good-neighborly relations on several occasions. When the treaty was finally signed in 2003, there was no mention of the issue of the national treasure in the text. Instead, the two countries established a Joint Commission to deal with the issue, but since 2003, the commission has met only sporadically, has failed to engage the two sides in substantial negotiations and thus has made little progress. The latest meeting of the Joint Commission, which was to take place in Moscow in March 2013, has been canceled by the Russian side, apparently in response to the Romanian Presidency's hostile accusations against Moscow regarding Russian intentions of rebuilding its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. No further recommendations have been issued by the Joint Commission at this time.

Democracy Activism and Defense Reform in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus

A recent bone of contention has been Romania's promotion of democratic governance and the EU in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Since 2009, the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, has made a stream of hostile declarations aimed at Russia, stating that Moscow cannot be allowed to regain its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, and that the Black Sea should be internationalized in order to prevent it from becoming "a Russian lake." At the present time, the benefits of normalizing its bilateral relations with Russia are not immediately obvious to Bucharest, and thus the Romanian government has outlined that "Russia may have a partner in Romania only insofar as our interests are respected." Taking this into account, the prospects for an improvement in relations are slim as the perception in both Bucharest and Moscow is that they currently have divergent political, strategic interests to one another. Romania suspects that an authoritarian and aggressive Russia is seeking to reconsolidate its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, an aim that is incompatible with Romania's current security interests in the region and values of democratic governance.

Moscow insists that the Romanian authorities do not have a clearly defined set of geopolitical, strategic pragmatic goals towards its East. Whether or not Bucharest's

foreign policy goals are well-defined, Russia's strategic pragmatism has proven politically incompatible with Romania's current security relationships with the US, NATO and the EU and its promotion of democracy in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. While Romania is certainly not the only Central European state to engage in democracy promotion activities in Russia's near abroad, these activities have become a mounting obstacle in Romanian–Russian relations. Moscow repeatedly suggests that Bucharest's definition of its strategic interests is excessively influenced by the US and the West. More specifically, that Romania has highly vested interests in a series of EU (the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership) and NATO (IPAP) regional democratization and defense reform projects that undermine Russia's interests. For example, Russia's PM Vladimir Putin strongly opposed the Eastern enlargement of NATO (to include Georgia and Ukraine) in 2008, which was strongly championed by Bucharest. Moreover, the recent announcement that the EU expects to sign Association Agreements (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with Ukraine, and possibly Moldova, by the end of 2013, commended by Romania, have been harshly criticized in Moscow.

The U.S. Missile Shield in Europe

President Băsescu announced in February 2010 that Bucharest had agreed to host up to 10 SM block II interceptors at Deveselu military base, as part of the US' European Missile Defense System. Russia's reaction was swift, definitively condemning this move by Bucharest. However, Moscow's reaction was not nearly as aggressive as it had been in the case of announcements of the same by Poland and the Czech Republic just a year earlier. Nevertheless, and in spite of Bucharest offering reassurances, Russia asserts that Romania is too obedient to Washington's hostile interests towards Russia, which are aimed at undermining Russia's nuclear deterrent. The Kremlin argues that locating the shield in Romania is not any more strategically beneficial to the shield's stated purpose, than Russia's previous proposals to host and jointly operate the radar on Russian or Azeri territory. Moscow's concern about NATO's recent behavior is evident in the 2010 Russian Military Doctrine, which details NATO as the most severe military risk to national security; this suggests that Russia would contemplate, for the first time, the possibility of renouncing its no-first-use (tactical) nuclear policy to tackle the threat of the missile shield. The aggressive Russian rhetoric, however, never materialized into open threats against Romanian security, as it did in the case of Poland. However, as a precaution, Russia announced it would rearm its Black Sea Fleet stationed in Sevasto-

pol and relocate an undisclosed number of short range ballistic missiles to South-West Ukraine.

Energy Security

Romania perceives Russian energy policy as aggressive, and based on using energy resources as political weapons against the West. Romania depends on Russia for about 30% of its energy resources (approx. 35% for gas). In spite of being such a large consumer of Russian gas, Romania pays the highest price for Russian gas among all EU members (over \$500 per cubic meter of gas—nearly 25% higher than Germany and over 30% higher than Poland or the Czech Republic). As a result, Romania strongly supports the common European Energy Security Strategy, including for the Eastern Partnership countries (Moldova in particular). At the same time, it also supports rival energy projects to Russia's pipeline strategy, such as Nabucco. While some of Romania's largest energy investors are Russian companies—such as Lukoil—with the discovery of significant shale gas and oil resources in Dobrogea in 2010, Romania expects its dependency on Russian energy resources will substantially drop in the future.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, Romanian–Russian relations continue to be hampered by the perceptions on both sides that they have incompatible political values, as well as by a specific set of diverging strategic interests. As a consequence, Bucharest and Moscow continue to talk past each other in strategic-political affairs. Despite the fact that Russia remains one of Romania's ten largest investors and economic partners, and that it is the most heavily-armed and aggressive great power in Romania's immediate vicinity, Romania's focus on democratic values and Russia's geopolitical pragmatism and authoritarian government are not a good match. Some converging interests exist, such as both sides' refusal to recognize Kosovo, but such occurrences are only sporadic.

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Russia has often been portrayed as a threat to the security of the new Central European allies. However, due to the security guarantee provided by the US and the American military presence on Romanian territory, perceptions of the Russian threat in Bucharest have diminished. As a result, the incentive to strategically engage Moscow has also been reduced. Unlike Poland, Romania did not engage in a regional reset with Russia in 2009. As long as its strategic partnership with the US is maintained and consolidated, the need to pragmatically engage with Russia will continue to be further reduced as Romanian security needs are fully met. At the present time, Romanian interests are served by the red lines outlined within the American strategic flexibility in its relations with Moscow: no acceptance of regional spheres of influence and no recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states (Biden, 2013). And maintaining a strong transatlantic relationship and a strong US military presence in Eastern Europe is bound to continue to serve Romanian security needs.

However, as the Americans are refocusing their strategic attention to Asia, Russia is slowly starting to fade as a security priority on the Western agenda. Recently, US President Barack Obama and Vice-President Joe Biden talked about their plan to continue their attempts at building positive relations with Russia, in spite of the mixed results of the reset policy over the last four years. As the aggressive rhetoric between Washington and Moscow draws down even further, it is possible that Romania may become more attune to this new strategic reality. Already Bucharest seems more willing to adopt a much more politically mature position towards Russia, by attempting to avoid any unnecessary diplomatic or political friction. It is far too early to tell whether Romania will seize this new chance to normalize its relation with Russia, but there is no doubt that, at this moment, both Bucharest and Moscow continue to be highly skeptical of one other.