

# UKRAINE-ROMANIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

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## Abstract

*The current level of Ukrainian-Romanian relations cannot be considered as satisfactory, especially considering the proximity and Ukraine's course towards European integration. It should be noted the existence of insufficient level of contacts at the highest level, especially at the intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary levels.*

*However, Ukrainian- Romanian relations are steadily entering a phase of constructive and mutually beneficial development despite the heavy historical legacy, current difficulties and problems. There are a signs that owing to geo-strategic position of both countries their objective national interests in key strategic issues gradually drew near. Deepening reforms in both countries should provide the basis for constructive Romanian-Ukrainian relations.*

**Keywords: Romania, Ukraine, foreign policy, cooperation**

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## **Introduction**

### **Relevance of the theme**

The relevance of the research is caused by the need of modern understanding of bilateral relations between Ukraine and Romania. The problem of mutually beneficial partnership between two countries increasingly acquires the actuality in the system of international relations of Ukraine. In this context, it is necessary to provide a clear justification for existing problems and identify the possible ways of their solution.

Studies of Ukrainian-Romanian relations have quite a long history. Recently this theme was developed by such famous Ukrainian researchers as S. Bostan, S. Hakman, I. Maksymenko, S. Hrihorishyn, H. Shelest, I. Studennikov, O. Dyakov, O. Parfenov, L. Chekalenko.

The purpose of the paper is to analyze the status and prospects of Ukrainian – Romanian relations, to identify priority areas where constructive cooperation is possible. For the last 22 years the Ukrainian-Romanian relations had contradictory character. On the one hand, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Romania was one of the first countries that recognized the independent state of Ukraine. From the other side, during long period the development of constructive relations was impeded by attempts of some radical political circles in Romania to lay direct territorial claims to Ukraine. And only after the signing of Treaty on good-neighborly relations and cooperation between Ukraine and Romania (June 2, 1997) this problem has been to some extent removed. Unfortunately, at present stereotypes continue to dominate in the relations between two peoples and countries. First of all, due to the complex of factors that have political, economic and even historical character. However, despite the uncertainty and economic competition, there is significant potential for the development of trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation between two countries.

The main contradicting areas between Ukraine and Romania are: firstly, the question of the international legal order and, secondly, the positions of Romania on the development of domestic Ukrainian areas. As for question of international law: here is position of Bucharest on belonging of certain Ukrainian territories, thereby challenging the Soviet-Romanian treaty on the state border (1961) and the principle of the inviolability of borders fixed by Romania in the Helsinki Act (1975) and in the basic political Treaty (1997). This fact has caused the prolonged absence of Ukrainian-Romanian basic documents which could lay the institutional framework for the development of relations between sovereign states. Thus, the Treaty on good-neighborly relations and cooperation between Ukraine and Romania was signed only in 1997, and the Treaty on the Ukrainian-Romanian state border - in 2004 and was the result of foreign policy situation's pressure on official Bucharest: Romania had been preparing for joining NATO and therefore had to close all issues related to the disputed territories. Meanwhile, Romania managed to lay in these Treaties some preconditions for further returning to such strategic issues as the delimitation of the continental shelf and exclusive economic zones in the Black Sea, and the status of Snake Island and several islands in the Danube River<sup>1</sup>.

### **Brief current history of bilateral relations**

It should be noted that after the election of the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich some changes have been placed in the priorities of Romanian-Ukrainian cooperation. Thus, after adopting the Law of Ukraine „On the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy” (July 1, 2010), under which it had been announced that Ukraine has a policy of non-alignment, the issue of Ukraine joining NATO was removed from the agenda and cooperation on Ukraine's implementation of Euro-Atlantic integration was rolled.

Signing of Ukrainian - Russian agreement on prolongation of the Russian Black Sea fleet's location in Crimea (April 21, 2010) caused the negative reaction from Romanian side. In particular, President Traian Basescu said in October 2010 that „the fact of Russia's prolongation of agreement on basing its fleet in Sevastopol does not suit Romania”<sup>2</sup>. A similar position was repeatedly expressed by Romanian politicians and experts.

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<sup>1</sup> Maksimenko Irina, „Ukrainian-Romanian relations in the context of European Union extending on the East”, Strategic Priorities, no. 3 (8), 2008, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> „President of Romania is uncomfortable due to Russian troops settlement in Sevastopol”, n.d, available at <http://www.zavtra.com.ua/news/guns/203206>.

A new stage in the Ukrainian-Romanian relations started on 18 May 2011, since the visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine K. Gryshchenko to Romania. This led to intensification of relations between two diplomatic ministries<sup>3</sup>.

Another important event was the organizing the first meeting on the Ukrainian-Romanian Joint Commission on Economic, Industrial, Scientific and Technical Cooperation (Kiev, April 10-11, 2012), where the sides discussed a wide range of issues of bilateral cooperation in various economic spheres, identified the main problematic aspects of trade and economic relations between Ukraine and Romania and outlined steps for further bilateral cooperation. Organization of the Joint Commission's first meeting has provided a significant impetus to the development of relations in various sectors of economic cooperation. In particular, during 2012 the Ukrainian side has been developed and submitted to the Romanian side a number of projects of bilateral inter-agency agreements.<sup>4</sup>

As an important step in the development of Ukrainian-Romanian relations was the official visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Leonid Kozhara to Romania on September 13, 2013 at the invitation of his Romanian counterpart Titus Corlatean.

The Head of Ukrainian Foreign Ministry had talks with his Romanian counterpart and had meeting with the Speaker of Romanian Senate Crin Antonescu. The parties discussed the full range of the Romanian-Ukrainian relations, Ukraine's European prospects, schedule of subsequent formal meetings and negotiations and identified further ways of developing trade and economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation.

The parties noted the richness of the meeting and stressed the intention to deepen political dialogue in 2014. Special attention was paid to the state of Ukraine's implementation of conditions for the successful signing of the Association Agreement and FTA with the European Union during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. During the negotiations "face to face" and in the format of the extended delegation the sides also discussed the possibility of accelerating the negotiations on the Agreement on local border traffic, the various aspects of cultural cooperation (in particular, opening branch of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Kiev and its branch in Chernivtsi). The possibility of bilateral cooperation within the OSCE (the organization in which Ukraine plays the role of presiding) was discussed in details.

As the result of the visit Titus Corlatean and Leonid Kozhara signed the plan of consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Romania and Ukraine for 2013-2014, which determined the schedule and directions of the two countries diplomats' work in various ways.

At the same time it should be noted that the level of intergovernmental contacts remains low. The last visit of Prime Minister of Ukraine to Romania took place in January 2002 (Anatoly Kinah) and Prime Minister of Romania to Ukraine - in March 1996 (Nicolae Vacaroiu).

Inter-parliamentary contacts are also characterized by negligible level of intensity. In the frame of visits on the parliamentary line only three visits were organized at the level of parliaments (the last - in November 2003 by Volodymyr Lytvyn). Ukrainian Parliamentary group on inter-parliamentary relations with Romania was created only on March 13, 2009. The visit of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine delegation to Bucharest headed by the Chairman of the Committee for European Integration and the parliamentary group of parliament of inter-parliamentary relations with Romania Boris Tarasiuk was organized on 6-7 May 2009.

However it seems that at the state level there is no coherent vision of Ukrainian-Romanian

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<sup>3</sup> The visit of Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister T. Baconschi to Ukraine took place on 9-10 November 2011. The meeting of Ukrainian and Romanian Ministers of Foreign Affairs was organized in the framework of the UN General Assembly in New York on September 27, 2012. Also, there was a meeting between the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich and President of Romania Traian Basescu within the NATO Summit in Chicago (May 21, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> In the frame of agreements which have been reached during the above-mentioned meetings of Joint Commission, on 25-26 October 2012 the Economic Mission of Romanian businessmen came to Dnepropetrovsk and took part in the meeting which was attended by representatives of 12 Romanian and 17 Ukrainian companies, representing engineering, metallurgy, light, food, agricultural, cosmetic, construction, transport, as well as companies for consulting services and Dnepropetrovsk Chamber of Commerce.

relations. In December 2010 the President of Ukraine issued the Decree according to which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been mandated to develop together with the Secretariat of the National Security and Defense of Ukraine and submit the draft projects of decrees on the concept of relations between Ukraine and Romania as well as a program of complex measures for solving the problems of Ukrainian-Romanian relations and countering threats to the national security of Ukraine. However, regulations that related to the Ukrainian-Romanian relations have not been elaborated.

The Ukrainian - Romanian relations acquire particular importance in the context of proclaimed Ukraine's course towards European integration. Romania has repeatedly stressed its support to the European integration course. The Declaration on Strategic Partnership between Romania and Poland (signed in 2009) contains a paragraph related to supporting Ukraine's and Moldova's European integration aspirations. President Traian Basescu in June 2013 declared his support for the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in their bid to sign the Association Agreements with the EU at the summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius .

As already noted, the adoption of the Ukraine's Parliament Act "On the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy" (2010), under which Ukraine conducts the policy of non-alignment, made some changes in the balance of power within the Black Sea region and partially in the Ukrainian-Romanian relations and put the issue of creation of the new security system in the Black Sea to agenda.

#### **Bilateral military cooperation**

It should be noted that Ukraine and Romania exercise military and political cooperation within NATO's Maritime Group BLACKSEAFOR (Black Sea Naval Cooperation)<sup>5</sup> and "Operation Black Sea Harmony"<sup>6</sup>.

The United States have a significant impact on the situation in the Black Sea region, especially their decision for placing missile defense on the Romanian territory (according to the agreement on the placement of missile defense system on Romanian territory of September 2011). The intentions of the U.S.A. have got a negative reaction from the Russian Federation, which saw in them a threat to their own national interests. At the same time, Ukraine has no clear position on missile defense, at least does not see it as a threat to its national interests.

#### **Transnistrian conflict**

The role of Romania in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict is the issue of particular interest. For a long time Romania has not acted as an active player in that process, primarily due to the fact that the so-called process of "Romanization of Moldova" in the early 1990-s became one of the catalysts of conflict with the left-bank territory and created the controversial image of Bucharest. Today's Romanian position on the Transnistrian conflict is based on the relationships with four other involved actors, in particular Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the European Union.

Thus, the victory of Alliance for European Integration in the Moldovan elections in 2009 has strengthened the impact of Romania in Moldova. Romania officially supports the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova as an independent state. It declares a common cultural and linguistic identity. In addition, the official Bucharest emphasizes that the restoration of the sovereignty of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders is a necessary condition for security and stability in the European continent.

Transnistria perceives the close historical ties between Chisinau with Bucharest as a threat, and Romania as an interested party. The probability of association between the two countries is perceived

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<sup>5</sup> The agreement on establishing BLACKSEAFOR was signed on April 2, 2001 in Istanbul by the foreign ministers of Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine. The main activities are: search and rescue operations, maritime traffic control, humanitarian assistance operations, combating mine's threat, operations on real environmental protection, evacuation of refugees from unequipped coast, fire support from the sea during peacekeeping operations, combating all species of marine terrorism.

<sup>6</sup> Operation „Black Sea Harmony” has been conducted by the Turkish Navy since March 2004. It involves constant monitoring of suspicious vessels by the Navy in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of their movements and identify possible illegal activity. „Black Sea Harmony” does not provide for enforcement measures against the suspect vessel on the high seas, but allows the boarding to the vessel with subsequent monitoring with the consent of its captain. Mainly, operations consist of requests for transport of goods, destinations, vehicles etc., The Turkish side officially invited the Black Sea countries to join the „Black Sea Harmony” in 2004. Russia joined the operation in 2006, Ukraine - in 2007, Romania - in 2009. Nowadays the Ukrainian cooperation in the framework of this operation is limited to the exchange of information.

as the greatest threat and Tiraspol strongly opposes it.

In particular, the Romanian president said that Moldova may become part of Romania in the next 25 years, with a border of Romania that will take place in the Dniester. This was seen in Tiraspol as an association with Moldova without Transnistria. At the same time, in addition to the basic interest as a neighboring country to resolve the conflict, Romania can always use the possibility of protecting the rights of its citizens through a large number of Moldovan citizens who have a second Romanian citizenship (officially about 120 000). Another issue of concern to Transnistria is the strengthening of military cooperation between Romania (as a member of NATO) and neutral Moldova.

With regard to the relations between Ukraine and Romania there are some ideas. Up to 2010 there was a widespread belief about the undesirability of Ukraine to attract Romania as a co-mediator in the conflict resolution process, as this would reduce the chances of Ukrainian regional leadership. In addition, disputes between the two countries on certain issues (such as islands of Zmeinyy, Maikan, some contradictions over the Danube River delta and issuing of Romanian passports to citizens of Ukraine) prevented the creation of appropriate conditions for cooperation and coordination position on the Transnistrian issue.

Some changes have taken place in 2011 during a meeting of heads of the MFA of Romania and Ukraine T. Baconschi and K. Gryschenko on May 18, 2011 in Bucharest. Two sides discussed the issues related to Moldovan-Transnistrian conflict's settlement and reached the agreement on more clear coordination of policy in this sphere.

As for the Russian-Romanian cooperation in the context of the Transnistrian settlement, it should be mentioned that during negotiations with Russian leaders in Moscow (15 February 2005) Romanian President T. Basescu put the question on joining Bucharest to the settlement in Transnistria, adding that if this issue is important for Ukraine's security, it is important for the security of Romania. However, at that time this issue was unattended due to the formal adoption of "Yushchenko plan" (formally declared by the President of Ukraine to settle the Transnistrian conflict) by all interested sides. The Russian government has returned to this issue in October 2010, when after tripartite negotiations between heads of Russia, France and Germany in Deauville (France) Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said that the success of negotiations on Moldovan-Transnistrian settlement would depend not only on Russia, Moldova, Transnistria and the EU, but on Romania as well. That was seen as invitation to Bucharest to participate in the settlement. Hereinafter Romania activated a policy in this direction.

Romania and Russia seek to extend their influence in Moldova. Moreover, some experts note the using of active anti-Romanian and anti-Russian rhetoric from both sides. For example, many references to Romanian desire to annex Moldova can be found in the Russian-language press than in Romanian. In addition, any reluctance to reduce the number of troops or remove ammunition from Transnistria also justified by the threat of Romanization of post-Soviet republic.

At the end of 2010 (on the eve of the OSCE summit in Astana) Moldovan and Romanian leaderships issued statements on Russia, which refused to withdraw its troops from Transnistria despite the commitments that were taken in Istanbul in 1999. Acting President of Moldova M. Gimpu even refused to take part in the summit of the OSCE, as this issue was not on the agenda. At the same time the Romanian President T. Basescu said that Romania does not feel itself comfortable because of the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria and Russian prolongation of the Sevastopol Navy base leasing until 2042.

Over the years Romania balancing between the desire to act as an independent mediator and the need to listen to a common EU position. At the same time, the statements of Traian Basescu on unification with Moldova and his unwillingness to sign an agreement on the borders that were defined in accordance with the Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact cause concern in France and Germany<sup>7</sup>.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, the current level of Ukrainian-Romanian relations cannot be considered as

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<sup>7</sup> In October 2013 the Romanian media spread information that the Bundestag's deputy on the foreign policy Philip Misfelder sent to Bucharest a message demanding the ratification of the border agreement with Moldova. The German legislator insisted that Romania is obliged to fulfill the commitments made in November 2010 and sign an agreement on the border regime with Moldova. This response was the result of President Traian Basescu's statements that Bucharest would not ratify this agreement.

satisfactory, especially considering the proximity and Ukraine's course towards European integration. It should be noted the existence of insufficient contacts at the highest level, especially at the intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary levels. The development of bilateral relations is uneven, and the periods of the contacts (such as in 2005-2008 and 2011-2013) replaced certain periods of cooling.

However, Ukrainian-Romanian relations are steadily entering a phase of constructive and mutually beneficial development despite the heavy historical legacy, current difficulties and problems. There are signs that owing to geo-strategic position of both countries their objective national interests in key strategic issues gradually drew near. Deepening reforms in both countries should provide the basis for constructive Romanian-Ukrainian relations. The interest in accelerated integration into European structures stimulates Bucharest to pragmatism and greater tolerance<sup>8</sup>.

Given the approaching time of presidential elections (in Romania – in the second half of 2014 and in Ukraine – in 2015) it is hardly to expect on restoration of bilateral contacts at the highest level in the near future. Thus, the best way for the further development of Ukrainian-Romanian relations should be the intensification of intergovernmental contacts, since the prime minister is a key figure in political and especially economic decisions.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ukrainian statehood in XX century*, Political Science, Kiev, 1996, p. 110.