

**Synthesis and Recommendations Following the  
Debate**  
**“Common Priorities for the Romanian-Ukrainian  
Bilateral Relations”**

**ROMANIA-UKRAINE**

**BILATERAL RELATIONS**

SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Sibiu, December 2019

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*The present document is not an institutional or a state point of view. The text captures ideas expressed in the debate "Common Priorities for the Romanian – Ukrainian Bilateral Relations", recommendations offered by invited and internal experts of the Global Studies Center, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu.*

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### **Synthesis and Recommendations Following the Debate "Common Priorities for the Romanian-Ukrainian Bilateral Relations"**

*Sibiu, December 13th 2019*

#### **General Points**

Regional relations have been desynchronized, being affected ever since 2008, following the war started by Russia in Georgia, a condition perpetuated by the events of 2014 which directly aimed at Ukraine. The lack of Western response to the conflict allowed Russia to develop a harmful behavior, negatively affecting Ukraine. As a consequence, bilateral relations were profoundly influenced by the geopolitical dynamics and the evolutions in the Black Sea region. At the moment, Crimea's militarization is being done in the context of operations in Syria. This way, Russia tends to incorporate the Black Sea into a larger conflict zone, making weapon supplying possible from Crimea through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, then through the Mediterranean Sea to the military bases in Syria. Growing military actions of Russia in the Black Sea are discouraging investments, and the annexation of Crimea has not only generated the change of naval routes, but also the terrestrial infrastructure, as the peninsula is disconnected from the telecommunication point of view.

Initially, the new context led to the stagnation of bilateral relations, marked by profound changes Ukraine is getting through, which simultaneously marked the need to deepen the cooperation between Romania and Ukraine on a multidimensional level.

By Romania's membership in the EU and by signing the Association Agreement between Ukraine and EU, the Romanian-Ukrainian trade relations have been facilitated and although they do not reach the desired intensity, they are presenting a constant growth.

From the perspective of multidimensional cooperation, Romania and Ukraine have intensified their military collaboration lately.

The Normandy Format holds a particular importance for the dialogue between East and West: it is the only institutionalized forum for the mediation of conflict

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generated by Russia in Eastern Ukraine, suggesting a limiting and accentuated dependence, inherently conditioned by the interests of Germany and France.

During the Normandy Format summit on December 9th 2019, Germany's support to Ukraine was obvious, while France displayed a neutral attitude. The ambition of France to affirm itself as the leader of Europe is being justified by changes in the political class in Germany and by Brexit. The desire to return to business relations with Russia could be observed at the level of some European states. Because the most economically influential states in EU are not in the physical proximity of Russia, they do not see the challenge and the effects of its aggressiveness, therefore making their tendency to get closer to Russia more and more probable to continue. At the same time, France and Germany are looking for a diplomatic reset in order to gain weight at the negotiation table with the USA, as they are unable to counterbalance the dialogue from the military point of view.

The international dilemma problematizing the course of Ukraine is given by the fact that Western countries do not want an aggressive Russia. The desire of both France and Germany to get their relationship with Russia back at a business as usual level is strengthening Russia's perspectives to consolidate its buffer zone in order to project its geostrategic interests. The novelty of negotiations classifies Crimea as a particular case and the Europeans avoid mentioning it in their discourses. Romania and Ukraine must cooperate not only on a defense and security level, but also on a social and economic level, on the closeness of their societies, as they are neighbors with common interests. From this perspective, for Romania, an adjustment of the Strategic Partnership with the USA would be necessary, because the current collaboration is more military and less economic.

The situation in Eastern Ukraine temporarily remains unsolved. Due to the conflict, Donbass was abandoned by approximately 2 million Ukrainian citizens, out of a total population of 5,5 million. The majority has relocated in other regions of the country and consequently the remaining population is predominantly pro-Russian, a fact that will balance the situation in favor of Moscow-supported political groups, in the context of local elections. Kiev will probably insist on the revision of representation formula within the negotiation process<sup>1</sup>, requesting the right to vote for the relocated population and for them to return to their region.

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1 The Trilateral Commission is formed by OSCE, Ukraine and representatives of separatist regions, who do not have a statute and do not occupy official positions, therefore being unable to offer legitimacy to the regions.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Building Trust and Eliminating Groundless Fears

Clarifying cultural-historical horizons and surpassing preconceptions on both sides represent key conditions to establishing new strategic objectives. Perpetuating an unfavorable climate has represented for Europe a proper space for Russian propaganda to destabilize the bilateral trust on topics such as national minorities, culture, history, religion and so on. In reality, the relations between Romania and Ukraine were not affected by artificial narrative patterns and, as a result, there is a viable foundation for a successful cooperation.

### Establishing a Common Agenda

Establishing a priority common agenda and organizing a bilateral meeting between presidents Klaus Iohannis and Volodymyr Zelensky would be both useful and necessary. Awareness of a common mission derives from the identification of needs and affirmation of some guiding principles, such as: keeping and growing the common regional heritage, building and consolidating the Euro-Atlantic core in the region, and promoting mutual values through engaging pro-Atlantic regional actors, respectively the states having both the determination and the coercive capacities (diplomatic, military and economic) to discourage Russia's actions.

The bilateral agenda cannot exclude establishing coordinates for harnessing mutual natural, economic and historical potential, emphasizing the use of resources offered by the EU, the Strategy for the Danube Region, the Eastern Partnership, the Three Seas Initiative, the Bucharest 9 Format, NATO etc.

### Multi, Mini and Bilateralism

Relatively recent, history has demonstrated Russia's ability to exploit the hypocrisy of certain European actors towards the aspirations of both Ukraine and Georgia<sup>2</sup>, as well as the doubtful capacity of the European Union to project physical

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<sup>2</sup> During the NATO Summit held in Bucharest in April 2008, besides Germany, French representatives, as well as at least two other governments indicated that they wish for the process of Membership Action Plan to be slowed

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security in its Eastern neighborhood. The inability of EU members to reach a consensus regarding mutual external politics, combined with divergences and ambiguities on the conceptualization of strategic autonomy indicates a lack of strategic maturity. However, the European Union has initiated a series of valuable financial instruments<sup>3</sup> for the military capacity development of its members. Also, EU member states' engagement in applying sanctions against Russia, following the illegal annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine, has been firmly supported.

The Normandy Format is rather minilateral and consolidates Ukraine's dependence on France and Germany's vision concerning the projection of a security climate in Ukraine and in the Eastern vicinity of UE, but also on the coercive (in)capacity of these two states, in relation with Russia, to sustain favorable conflict solving solutions (for example: organizing local elections and maintaining the control of borders). At the moment, Russia controls 400 kilometers of the common border with Ukraine, a fact that allows a physical constant nurture of the conflict. At the same time, the two Minsk Agreements are contradicting each other in regards to organizing of local elections and the Ukrainian border.

In order to escape a potentially vulnerable and limiting negotiation framework, it would be proper for Ukraine to explore the possibility of extending the mediation group, appealing to the principle of strengthening it by adding states directly preoccupied of limiting Russia's influence in the region. This way, changing from a minilateral framework to a multilateral one would balance the situation in favor of Ukraine, by attracting three key-states: USA, Romania and Poland.

The USA-Romania and USA-Poland Strategic Partnerships (2006, respectively, 2018), the US Congress resolutions (2018-2019) to strengthen the military presence in the Black Sea, the support to develop Ukraine's military capabilities and the measures to limit the construction of Nord Stream 2, all show the regional relevance and legitimacy of Romania and Poland, and the firm engagement of the three allies (USA, Romania and Poland) to deter Russia's actions.

A multilateral backup formula is favorable to Ukraine in order to avoid disengagement similar to the one in 2008, maybe even considering the larger umbrella

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down, this way opposing to the plan of adherence to NATO of both Georgia and Ukraine. A short period of time after the Bucharest Summit, Russia attacked Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, long-term limiting NATO's perspectives of enlargement towards the East. Beginning with 2015, Germany and France have become mediators within the Minsk Agreement and subsequently within the Normandy format for cessation of conflict started by Russia in Ukraine.

<sup>3</sup> The European Defence Fund and PESCO.

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of EU – USA, which identifies with the strategic need of Ukraine, but without definitively excluding a potential risk of slowing down and diluting the effort to solve the conflict.

The bilateral relations with Romania and Poland have a double valence, these being able to positively balance Ukraine's aspirations within extended formats, and at the same time could consolidate the regional security network and economic development. Romania and Poland have the capacity to support Ukraine in reaching the standards necessary for Euro-Atlantic integration and also to build common initiatives to revise international law norms accordingly to the new typology of threats in order to address external aggressors.

EU's hesitation to extend itself could contribute to the maintaining of some regional risks. Although at the moment, a context for enlargement had not been created, the European Union could offer integration projects. The bilateral support could concentrate on the capacity of European Union to initiate these integration projects, by crystalizing a partnership for cooperation in fields such as: monetary, economic, borders, energy, social, technology and digitalization, fight against corruption and crime, good governance etc.

### Interconnection as a Development and Integration Principle Leads to a Win-Win Scenario

Romania and Ukraine have the chance to initiate coordination instruments and mechanisms in the field of security and defense, policies for facilitating communication, for stimulating investments in the Danube Region, infrastructure projects, maritime cooperation, energy and environment in the Black Sea region.

The two states have the chance to explore the opportunity of a common energy project in the Black Sea (for example, through the Trans-Balkan pipeline and/or through interconnecting the Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa pipeline), this way taking the role of an energy hub, while also taking into consideration Ukraine's high capacity to stock the gas and its interest for supply diversification, respectively for reducing the dependence on Russian gas. Ukraine's membership in the Energy Community and its assumption of implementing the principles of the third energy package, as a member state, have the goal of creating a functional energy and gas market, a fact that will allow its integration

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in the ENTSO-G and ENTSO-E. There is a potential for cooperation in regional projects in the field of regional market integration, reform implementation assistance and perfection of regulatory framework. Of high importance is cooperation in regional energy infrastructure projects such as BRUA.

Appreciating a maximum operation capacity of TurkStream and Nord-Stream 2, EU records an additional demand of 30 billion m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas. In the field of energy infrastructure, Romanian-Ukrainian efforts could concentrate on the optimal operation of transit in the energy transportation system.

In order to reach these aspirations, the bilateral effort must be permanent through a periodical collaboration within mixt commissions for economic and commercial cooperation, technical and scientific cooperation, verifying the border route by making new documentation, technical-military cooperation, culture and minorities. At the same time, reviewing the activity of some commissions with economic and technical targets is necessary, as well as detachment from sensitive political issues (an example could be Ukraine-Poland bilateral cooperation model). Ukraine's cooperation with Romania could include common technology development, there being a great potential in this aspect, but Romania has displayed a rather reticent attitude, trying to avoid possible reactions from Russia. On the same note, deepening academic partnerships and boosting the activity of think-tanks represent an essential component to identify, analyze and legitimize resorts for projecting a sustainable regional environment. In the field of cyber security, Romania could transit from the multilateral format to a bilateral cooperation mechanism, engaging capabilities and expertise, based on demand and standardization from Ukraine.

It is important for Romania to acknowledge the necessity and mutual benefits that would intervene by supporting Ukraine to participate in NATO common trainings, in projects within the Three Seas initiative, by consolidating NATO's support-package type of instruments, by promoting a coherent and inclusive security vision to strengthen NATO's Eastern Flank and utilizing the Bucharest 9 Format to increase Ukraine's capacities, by harnessing operational programs through the European Neighborhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership and the Strategy for the Danube Region.





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### Final Consideration

It is extremely important for the two states to collaborate in order to understand the regional dynamics, the capitalizing of opportunities, but also to anticipate the nature of the common threats they may face in the near future. In the same way, the conjugated effort of Romania and Ukraine in multilateral formats must pursue EU and NATO's engagement to offer supporting policies, a sustainable and secure state in the Black Sea region and to apply international coercive measures to prevent the emerges of new frozen conflicts with contagious effects proper to gray zones, in which Russia prefers to operate and to undermine the nation states' Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

## SWOT MATRIX: Bilateral Relations Romania – Ukraine

### GENERAL POINTS

**INTERDEPENDENCES:** Romania's relationship with Ukraine starts on their geographical interdependence – common border of approx. 600 km and cultural-historical interdependence – the third biggest minority on the Ukrainian territory. Romania's membership in the EU and NATO, and Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations are perfectly compatible and represent premises for consolidating cooperation, mutual trust and assuring a security perimeter in the geographical East of Europe. The common preoccupations for securing the Black Sea, integrating Georgia in the pro-Atlantic process, and assuring an European evolution for the Republic of Moldova, represent motivational resorts for discouraging Russian threats and avoiding instability escalation.

### STRENGTHS

*(positive variables, capabilities, current certainties)*

- Romania's support for the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine;
- mutual interest for regional security and security in the Black Sea;
- utilizing the USA-Romania Strategic Partnership for projecting American and allied military power in the region and in the Black Sea;
- management of NATO's Trust Fund for sustaining cyber security in Ukraine;
- the Normandy Format is especially important for the East-West dialogue, being the only institutionalized forum focused on mediating the conflict started by Russia in Eastern Ukraine;
- lately, the bilateral military cooperation has been intensified;
- engagement to the international law and Romania's refusal to recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea;
- the Association Agreement between Ukraine and EU allowed the facilitation of trade relations;
- preoccupations for diversifying the energy production and supply;
- common promotion of democratic values in the Eastern Neighborhood;
- common fluvial network;
- experience in the domain of emergency service;
- considerable ethnical links: the Romanian community in Ukraine is the third in size;
- Kiev's availability to solve the statute of national minorities;
- successful academic cooperation;
- both states benefit of experts in key domains, with accent on industries and technologies of interests for the society of the future.

### RISKS → OPPORTUNITIES

Involvement of RO-UKR economic dynamics in the last two decades, reduced capacity of EU funds absorption for infrastructure and border projects, and lack of great investments in industry and common energy projects lead to a disadvantageous regional interdependence and an improper development rhythm. A paradigm reversal is necessary, by accentuating regional interdependence relations and exploring options to enlarge the multilateral formats in order to create a *trust-network* and a *security-belt* in the Eastern Neighborhood and to accelerate development.

- EU demonstrates an incapacity of strategic assumption and projection under a smart-power vision in the Eastern Neighborhood;
- regional frozen conflicts remain unsolved (example: Transnistria);
- regional pro-European aspirations are usually undermined by the internal political instability of the Republic of Moldova;
- Russia's influence in the Republic of Moldova puts in difficulty the perpetuation of a pro-European political system;
- the prevalence of multilateral cooperation, instead of bilateral, leads to a reduced cooperation in the majority of the fields between the border neighbors;
- the judicial dispute regarding the delimitation of the continental shelf and economic zones got more complicated because of the illegal annexation of Crimea;
- collective judicial incapacity to recognize and punish hybrid threats and active measures that affect the integrity, development and security of the states;
- Romania's reduced capacity of European funds absorption for border projects on strategic cooperation (business, infrastructure, digitalization, security, energy, good governance etc);
- the inter-institutional mutual engagement is below the optimal level, resulting in not reaching consensus on key themes in detriment of empowering common effort to limit Russia's aggressive behavior;
- weak intercultural cooperation, unproductive deadline (2023) for solving the problem of minorities' statute in Ukraine;
- the financial instruments of the Strategy for the Danube Region are inefficiently exploited – less than 40%.

### WEAKNESSES

*(negative variables, intimate risks, present certainties)*

### OPPORTUNITIES

*(positive variables, external hypotheses, capitalisation perspectives, options for future)*

- planned actions for assuring military and economic security in the Black Sea;
- supporting Ukraine's process of pre-accession to EU, facilitating supporting instruments within NATO;
- exploring the opportunities of extending the N4 negotiation format with Russia, for example under the EU umbrella and with USA participation;
- signing the bilateral agreement for technical-military cooperation;
- constant assistance for Ukraine's cyber security, in bilateral format;
- identifying potential reasons for Russia to give up on territorial conditioning on Ukraine;
- enhancing Eastern Partnership's capacity to project stability in the Eastern Neighborhood and to draw a certain road to EU membership for the beneficiated states;
- understanding/assuming the advantages of cooperation and the common threats to which Romania and Ukraine are exposed;
- promoting *Intermarium* strategies by harnessing the potential of the Three Seas Initiative for regional economic integration;
- deepening the trilateral format in order to secure an European evolution for the Republic of Moldova;
- harnessing the bilateral relation and engaging Poland for supporting Ukraine's integration efforts through multilateral formats;
- growing the rate of EU funds absorption by Romania for trans-border cooperation and strategic partnerships + bilateral options for developing alternative energy capacities;
- development of regional projects (infrastructure, energy, communications);
- development of maritime and fluvial routes, empowering the Strategy for the Danube Region;
- humanitarian aid for civilians in the Eastern region of Ukraine;
- strengthening expert networks and academic debates to offer recommendations to the political leadership on the bilateral agenda and interconnecting the Ukrainian society with the European one;
- the signing of the bilateral agreement for technical and military cooperation;
- establishing an agenda and organizing a bilateral meeting between Iohannis and Zelensky in 2020.

### BEST SCENARIO

**BUILDING TRUST:**

RO-UKR cultural-historical conciliation; establishing a priority common agenda and organizing a Iohannis-Zelensky bilateral meeting. Establishing coordinates for harnessing common natural, economic and military potential, emphasizing maximum usage of the resources offered by EU, Strategy for the Danube Region, Eastern Partnership, Three Seas Initiative, NATO etc. Supporting Ukraine within multilateral formats for reaching necessary standards for Euro-Atlantic integration and actors' firm engagement to regional security and limiting Russia's threat. Common lobby for adapting the international law norms to the new typology of aggressions.

### WORST SCENARIO

**HYPOTHESES:** Attracting Ukraine in internal nationalist games and political instability will deteriorate the East-West dialogue and depreciate the regional security climate. EU's incapacity of strategic assumption and coagulation of pro-Ukrainian international lobby for solving the crisis and the Russia-occupied regions' statute, will confirm West's coercive diplomacy incapacity and approval for Russia to give the same treatment to all Euro-Atlantic aspiring countries in the Eastern Neighborhood. The lack of EU and NATO engagement encourages the appearance of new frozen conflicts, with contagious effects, proper for gray zones and for applying active measures.

### THREATS

*(negative variables, scenarios, hypotheses, future probabilities)*

- constant and accentuated militarization of the Black Sea by Russia;
- the incapacity to solve the conflict with Russia could represent an obstacle to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration;
- Russia's „success” in promoting a policy of including the Black Sea in the war circuit of Syria;
- violation of exclusive economic zones by Russia following the illegal annexation of Crimea, with tendencies of regional power redistribution;
- ineffective coercive diplomacy: the parts' failure to attract the engagement of external actors and international organizations for imposing the Russian Federation to respect the international law;
- persistence in generally prioritizing internal problems: lack of dialogue and coherent understanding concerning sensitive and emerging priorities on the agenda of each part;
- stagnating bilateral cooperation due to the unsolved problem of the Romanian minority in Ukraine;
- political instability in Ukraine and loss of consensus on medium and long term strategic priorities;
- EU's lack of engagement regarding enlargement;
- the vision, individual interests and strategic autonomy tendencies of the great powers could register a lack of strategic assumption, generally counting on soft instruments in relation with Russia;
- hybrid threats and influence operations are difficult to counteract on the basis of a weak cooperation;
- unfavorable accentuation of #Ukrainegate could generate a growing apathy of US Presidential Administration towards Ukraine;
- Turkey's passivity toward both the actions of Russia in the region and its forces strategic projection in the Western military district and, respectively, in the Southern one;
- The rising of nationalist currents in Europe emphasizes the lack of trust in regional and global institutions.



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