
Romanian foreign policy options in the first years after the fall of communism

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THE GRADUAL FALL of the communist system in East-Central Europe placed the nations from this area in an entirely new situation, not only from political and socio-economic point of view, but also from their foreign policy and security system of alliances.

In fact, Central and South-Eastern Europe are less geographical, but more geopolitical entities. Since the collapse of Soviet Union, Western Europe became the manager of the two regions: Central and South-Eastern Europe, which have maintained their strategic importance, but for different reasons. For example, Central Europe during the post - Cold War decade was a safe area, enjoying the protection of the European Union and NATO. By contrast, South-Eastern Europe was a rough area, exporting to the West the instabilities. But over the years, both regions became an area of strategic interest for the Western European and the North Atlantic institutions. The first step towards one Euro-Atlantic policy in Central and South-Eastern Europe consisted defining the regions and the Western interests in these regions. (Duna 2000: 201-202) And, without any doubt, in East -Central Europe, the events which took place after 1989 have brought transformations all over Europe. In this situation, the Euro-Atlantic states, organizations and institutions had several alternatives regarding this region, such as: cooperation, integration or to do nothing.

In the same time, the strategy of each states in East-Central -Europe had its particularities, that has been influenced by the new reality which appeared on the continent after the collapse of the Soviet Union and also by the war in Yugoslavia. First of all it

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appeared in order to face the multiple pressures of the insecurity in the zone. And, of course, any government, in any country, has the minimal obligation to safeguard the territorial integrity of the state. Then, some of the states in the East-Central-Europe zone asked and believed to be better protected by the Western defensive structure and others are outside to any security structure in Europe. On the other hand, the concept of security includes not only the military component, but also others which the states from this region was not only pressing in the same way as the first one, but they are in a total interdependence. This was because the process of democratization and rebuilding of the institutional and economic structures in former communist European country was correlated with the process of building up the system of European security and first, Central –East-Europe has adhered to the formula of a new European system of security, initiated by CSCE. (Pușcaș 1998: 44-45)

Looking on the whole at what happened in the first years after the removal the communist regime, security constituted the common option and desire for every former European communist country, but for the Romania, the security problem is extremely acute and pressing in condition in which after 1989, all the states from East -Central-Europe have decided to become part of Western system. In fact, the greatest challenge facing Romania soon after 1989 was exit from its isolation, imposed at the beginning of the communist regime by the Soviet Union and then, in the 80's, by the Nicolae Ceausescu.

Within the context of change for Romania was necessary to found strategy to follow in this complex situation. Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary might be an exception because until 1985 they had been part of a Western strategy with reference to “Central Europe”, which also regarded the former East Germany. The events of 1989-1990 have introduced new and unexpected components in the development of that strategy especially since the necessitated immediate solutions. (Pușcaș 1996: 123).

From the point of view of international relations, the disappearance of the USSR determined Romania to orient its efforts towards its acceptance by the emerging Western structures. Romania started the European Union accession process later than its neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe although its relations with the European Community and Romania's geostrategic location within the Carpathian - Danube - Black Sea zone, in the proximity of energy sources in the Caspian Sea and the Middle East, are advantages that could have recommended the country as an attractive candidate. Despite frequent official declarations expressing the country's intention and determination to reintegrate with Europe after the 50-year communist rule, Romania did not follow an aggressive and sustained policy to join the regional organization in early 1990's. After establishing diplomatic relations with the European Community in

1990, Romania signed a Trade and Cooperation Agreement in 1991, and, in 1993, it concluded the Europe Association Agreement that would become the legal framework for the implementation of the accession process. (Marine 2011: 88)

The agreement imposed on the associated countries that they adapt their economic system to the European demands in view of achieving structural compatibility. The admittance of Romania into the community of states aspiring to integrate into the European structures determined the government to pay even greater attention to democratic procedures and to human rights. A first step in this sense was Romania's signing of some essential agreements, like the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and of the additional protocols. Then, the government rethought its policy towards minorities. In order to underline the adherence of Bucharest to European values, Romania was, on 11 May 1995, the first country to present the Council of Europe with the instruments for the ratification of the Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Even if these steps were made in order to redeem the country's and governments' public image, the adoption of these documents by Romania was of major importance. (Popa 2006: 684)

It was only in June 22, 1995, that the Romanian government submitted Romania's application for European Union accession. One day earlier, on June 21, 1995, the leaders of the Romanian political parties had signed the Snagov Declaration, expressing their parties commitment to support the country's accession process. In the same year, the Department for European Integration was established, and the government launched a National Program for Legislative Harmonization aimed at the transition towards the *acquis communautaire*. The openings lost steam when the European Commission noted in the conclusion of the Regular Country Report for 1997 that is uncertain whether Romania will be in a position to assume the obligations of membership in the medium term. The Commission urged Romania to take action to improve the shortcomings identified in the report and suggested that adherence to the European Union pre-accession strategy will prepare Romania better to meet the obligations of membership. (Marine 2011: 89)

In Romania, EU accession negotiations were conducted in parallel with an accelerated process by which Romania will aim to become NATO member.

Is already well known that in the first two years after 1989, Romanian external policy was marked by the presence in the East of a still strong Soviet Union, but also by the complex evolution of international relations following the Gulf War, etc. Thus, in the midst of the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union, on 22 March 1991, the Treaty of collaboration, neighbourhood and friendship between the USSR and Romania was signed in Moscow. It was to be the last such treaty signed by the Soviet Union,

and it was in fact a sign of respect made by the new leaders of Romania towards the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, as in December 1989 the Soviets had been the first to recognize the National Salvation Front as the legitimate authority in Romania. (Popa 2006: 682)

But after the disappearance of the Soviet Union (December 1991), and the abolishment of the Warsaw Pact (which left Romania and the other countries of Eastern Europe outside any security zone) it became clear that the West would dominate Eastern Europe (at least as long Russia will be in a situation of confusion in terms of political and economic level), Romanian leader Ion Iliescu has changed its external strategy. In that conditions, NATO began to be considered a viable option by an increasing number of personalities of Romanian politics, diplomacy and military structures. And, once in 1994 NATO expansion to the East appeared possible, Ion Iliescu himself has initiated negotiations with the North Atlantic Alliance. (Gallagher 2010: 147) Also, others political leaders from Bucharest have argued that the country meets the military conditions for membership, but Romania it was refused first. In that conditions, it started a process for reforming and modernizing the Romanian army and to bring them closer to Western standards. On 14 September 1994, the Partnership for Peace between Romania and NATO was officially accepted by the North-Atlantic Council, and Bucharest joined the other states of the former Soviet bloc. Giving way to Western pressure, Romania had to make constant efforts towards regulating the relationship with its neighbours. (Popa 2006: 684-685)

On the other hand, from 1994 until 1999, NATO has been increasingly interesting by the Eastern Europe, especially from the necessity to promote a stable climate which sustain the peacekeeping efforts in the former Yugoslavia. Even more, after the terrorist attacks on New York on 11 September 2001, the strategic importance of countries such as Romania, which represent important stopover for the Middle East area has increased, especially in view of Americans. (Gallagher 2010: 148-155)

Looking back at the first years after the fall of communism, we can see that Romania embraced firmly the European Union accession project in the late 1990s, and the accession efforts to join the European Union and NATO took more a decisive course after 1998 when a center-right government showed its determination to break away from policies of previous admirations that had successively followed the events of December 1989. The proposed transformations of the Romanian society in its transition to a democratic state based on the rule of law and towards a free market economy followed an evolutionary path. It was the imperative obligation to adhere to the European Union *acquis communautaire* and to meet the NATO membership requirements that pressured Romania to undergo a significant reorganization of its institutions. (Marine 2011: 88-89)

In the late '90, Romania becoming more realistic regarding the need to fulfil the conditions for its integration into Western security and political structure. Throughout this long process, the Romanian authorities have not neglected the policy of proximity, especially the relations with Republic of Moldova which, in that new context of EU and NATO enlargement, had a special importance for diplomacy from Bucharest. Also, Romania started a successful series of initiatives in the field of cooperation at the Danube Region and at the Black Sea region, and promoted regional cooperation, security, extension of democracy and cultural diplomacy.

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