

Russia's foreign policy and its new instruments of pressure. Looking for "efficiency"

Case study: Romania

Ileana Racheru¹

Abstract

This study aims at analysing how the foreign policy instruments used by Russia have influenced the agenda of the public debates in Romania. The analysis will focus both on hard instruments (territorial annexations and wars that took place in the territorial proximity of Romania) and on soft instruments (propaganda).

¹ Ileana Racheru, Ph.D., researcher, Romanian Diplomatic Institute, associate researcher, Experts for Security and Global Affairs. This policy paper is elaborated within the project "Understanding the Eastern Neighborhood. A unique platform for comprehensive debates and analysis on Russian affairs", implemented by ESGA between February 2018 – January 2019. All the views and opinions belong to the author and do not necessarily represent those of the ESGA partners.

Diaconu Coresi Str., nr. 53, Bucharest, Romania

Web: www.esga.ro Email: contact@esga.ro

Introduction

Romania has maintained a cold and distant relationship with Russia in the entire period following the collapse of the communist regime.

Immediately after the 1989 revolution historians and mass-media unveiled the consequences of Romania's presence on Moscow's sphere of influence.

Prominent intellectuals have extensively published press articles critical to communism (which was inevitably associated with Russia). Western political regimes were described as "Europe of butter" (welfare and democracy). Romanians embraced the Europeanization as unique strategy to overcome the transition difficulties and put themselves completely away from Russian influence.

The most important bilateral document agreed between the two countries was the Basic Political Treaty signed in 2003. The latest bilateral contacts were recorded in 2013 during a visit paid by the Romanian foreign minister to Moscow. In 2010 Romanian authorities have accepted the US proposal to be involved in the development of a missile defense system in Europe. Russia has strongly criticized Romania's decision although the antiballistic system installed in Romania doesn't have the technical capabilities to intercept Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles. The shield aims to protect Europe against missile attacks launched from Iran. Romania is considered the most important partner of US in the Black Sea region. In 2011 Bucharest and Washington have signed a Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for the XXI century². In 2014 Romania has condemned and refused to recognize the annexation of Crimea.

Romania imports 20% of its gas consumption needs from Russian Federation (the remaining quantities are provided by domestic production). In the context of the events in Ukraine, Romanian authorities have announced that if Russia will cut the supplies Romanian consumers will not be affected because Romania has storage capacities³.

Romanian-Russian contacts are not limited to bilateral agenda. The interests of the two countries compete in the Black Sea region. The Black Sea region has been reconsidered on Bucharest's foreign policy agenda especially after Romania became a NATO and EU member. Romania has pursued a strategy aimed at bringing the Black Sea region on EU policy agenda by creating informal partnerships with major EU countries (Germany) to support new

2 Relații bilaterale: Federația Rusă, available at <http://mae.ro/bilateral-relations/4506#783>.

3 Ministrul Energiei, Răzvan Nicolescu, la RFI: România nu va fi afectată de o întrerupere a gazului rusesc către Ucraina, Radio France Internationale, 21.03.2014, <http://www.rfi.ro/stiri-economie-48494-ministrul-energiei-razvan-nicolescu-rfi-romania-nu-va-fi-afectata-o-intrerupere>, accessed, 12.11.2014.

Diaconu Coresi Str., nr. 53, Bucharest, Romania

Web: www.esga.ro Email: contact@esga.ro

projects and to implement new frameworks for cooperation with several former Soviet states bordering Black Sea (in the context of pro-Western colored revolutions). In the Black Sea region, Romania has showed two identities: promoter of EU policies for democratization and cooperation with countries from the region, partnerships initiatives for the facilitation of cooperation in the economic and energy fields. According to the National Defense Strategy (2015)⁴, Romania's key priorities in the Black Sea region are to promote policies ensuring security, stability and progress in the countries bordering the region. The Black Sea region is a major supplier of insecurity for Romania, according to the 2015 strategy. The document mentioned the conflicts from Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Georgia as one of the main security threat for Romania. .

Romania and Russia have also different agendas in their relationship with former Soviet states from the WBS (Wider Black Sea region). Romania supports the European integration of Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Georgia. At the NATO summit held in Bucharest in 2008, Romania has supported granting MAP for Ukraine and Georgia. Russia has proposed its own strategy of integration for the former Soviet republics under the Eurasian Union.

1. Russia as a security treat in Eastern Europe. National perspectives on Russia/EU/US/NATO .

1.1 The politicians/decision-makers

Crimea's annexations and Russia's war against Ukraine were mentioned in the electoral platforms of the two main candidates in the 2014 presidential elections. Klaus Iohannis and Victor Ponta had similar viewpoints regarding Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Iohannis's platform⁵ mentioned that Ukrainian crisis changed the geopolitical situation of Black Sea region and Romania faces security challenges which have not been recorded on the continent since the end of Cold War. Victor Ponta⁶ indicated Russia and its actions in Ukraine as the most important security threats to Romania "Vladimir Putin and the Federation Russian ... are the biggest security risk for Romania after 1989".

To counteract the consequences of Moscow's actions, Klaus Iohannis proposed a strengthening in Romania's partnership with NATO and the United States. "Eastern Europe and Romania need

4 Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării pentru perioada 2015-2019, available at http://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Strategia_Nationala_de_Aparare_a_Tarii_1.pdf, accessed 26.10.2018.

5 Klaus Iohannis România lucrului bine făcut, <http://www.iohannispresedinte.ro/files/userfiles/Program-prezidential.pdf>, accessed 15.11.2014.

6 Victor Ponta: Federația Rusă reprezintă pentru România cel mai mare risc de securitate, *Evenimentul zilei*, <http://www.evz.ro/victor-ponta-federatia-rusa-reprezinta-pentru-romania-cel-mai-mare-risc-de-securitate.html>, 10.11.2014, accessed 12.11.2014. Victor Ponta președinte, <http://victorponta.ro/materiale/program-prezidential-victor-ponta.pdf>, accessed 15.11.2014.

strong messages from the US to reiterate the security guarantees in this part of Europe ... To show that the spirit of Article 5 is still strong, that no one can redraw political boundaries or spheres of influence ". Iohannis believes that the strategic partnership with the US should be strengthened by increasing the Alliance's military presence in Romania and Bulgaria. Russia's actions in Ukraine also require additional costs for Romania's military budget.

Both candidates indicated the relationship with Moldova as a priority in Romania's foreign policy. Klaus Iohannis has promised in his electoral platform to "build a political and social consensus to secure Moldova's European path as a national priority of Romania". According to Ponta, Moldova's European integration is a "legitimate" interest for Romania and it "clearly collides with what Russian Federation wants".

1.2 The experts

Romanian community of experts in political and security developments in the former Soviet Space includes those specialists in "any subject of international policy agenda" and a very small group of people with an objective knowledge. The first category consists of former and current officials, academics or civil society experts. They are frequently present in interviews and media talk-shows. Usually, they expose general opinions about the political and security developments in the former Soviet Union and use Western, English version of Russian media or Romanian publications as sources for their analysis. Less visible in the media the second group includes those experts who have access to sources in Russian language or have been educated in Russian universities.

Is Russia a threat for Romania?

Romanian experts considered Russia's new military deployments in Crimea a source of concerns: "*Russia deployed the K-300 Bastion-P complex in Crimea. The Bastion-P complex/system is the land based variant of the P-800 Oniks supersonic anti-ship missile (NATO designation SS-N-26 Strobile). The missiles can engage any naval target within a 300 mile radius and has been explicitly designed to counter US Navy Aegis equipped ships. The missile is very difficult to intercept and there is no NATO equivalent to it. Russia has also deployed S-300 PMU (SA-20 Grumble) anti-aircraft missile systems in Crimea which can engage aircraft within a 200 km radius at high and medium altitudes. Furthermore Russia is planning to deploy S-400 (SA-21 Growler) anti-aircraft missile systems in the Southern Military District, in Krasnodar, as part of its air-defense modernization plan. The Growler can engage targets at high and medium altitudes within 400 km range. The deployments of these modern and capable anti-aircraft missile systems aims at offsetting NATO's superiority in aircraft and precision guided munitions. For Bulgaria and Romania, who are trying modernize their air forces this represents a very dangerous development*"⁷. The new geopolitics established after Crimea's annexation and Russia's war against Ukraine affected the perceptions about Romania's interests in Republic of

7 Interview with George Vişan, editor civitaspolitics.org; associated researcher Romanian Energy Center.
Diaconu Coresi Str., nr. 53, Bucharest, Romania
Web: www.esga.ro Email: contact@esga.ro

Moldova and the Black Sea area: „Russian actions in the Wider Black Sea Area (WBSA) are to be regarded as a significant threat - which means more than a security and defense risk - for Romania. Simply, because Russia aims at deliberately destabilizing the present power distribution (balance of power) in the WBSA⁸. Romanian experts are also concerned about also Russia's unpredictable behavior: " Romania has a long border with the unstable Ukraine. After Crimea's annexation, Russia is also our neighbor and Russia is acting unpredictably using all sorts of pretexts and methods(including military force to achieve what it considers as its geostrategic advantages"⁹. Russia is considered a threat for Romania because it puts into question the fundamental pillars of European security: Moscow has changed borders by force and launched a military assault on a sovereign state¹⁰.

After the annexation of Crimea, experts have also advanced a less probable scenario in which Romania and Russia will dispute the exclusive economic zones in the vicinity of Serpents Island¹¹.

2. Kremlin Propaganda in Romania

In Romania, the Russian propaganda had an important influence upon the internal debates about the need to organize a referendum for amending the Constitution (2018), but its contribution was not a defining one. In the absence of local political and institutional supporters, the referendum would have not been organized.

2.1 Propaganda Messages

The Russian propaganda has huge influence on agenda setting for the public debates in Romania. The ideas transmitted by various media channels funded from Moscow have penetrated the mass media, the social networks and the Romanian institutions (parliament, universities...). The messages sent do not necessarily favour the political regime in Russia. Most of them aim at discrediting the EU and NATO, the reformed Romanian institutions. At the same time, nationalist or ultra-religious opinions are promoted, according to which Romanians are threatened by imminent dangers coming from Western Europe.

8 Interview with Florin Diaconu, senior lecturer Faculty of Political Science, Bucharest University, senior researcher Romanian Diplomatic Institute.

9 Interview with Angela Grămadă, researcher, Experts for Security and Global Affairs.

10 Interview with George Vișan, editor civitaspolitics.org; associated researcher Romanian Energy Center..

11 Laurențiu Pachiu, Radu Dudău, The Ukraine Crisis: Legal and Energy Security Impact in the Black Sea Basin,

http://www.enpg.ro/shared/images/publicatii/79/PachiuDudau_Crimea%20legal%20status_Black%20Sea%20EEZ.pdf, accessed 17.11.2014.

Dan Dungaciu: Rusia își permite cu România ceea ce nu și-ar permite cu alte state europene, 26.12.2012, <http://www.romanialibera.ro/opinii/interviuri/dan-dungaciu--rusia-isi-permite-cu-romania-ceea-ce-nu-si-ar-permite-cu-alte-state-europene-288411>.

The ideas of the Russian propaganda are promoted by the press and institutions officially financed by the state budget of the Russian Federation. In Romania, the Russian Federation officially sponsors the Sputnik site and the Russian Centre for Science and Culture. The propaganda is also supported by Romanian politicians and parties or by their advisers. This category includes especially persons investigated by justice institutions for corruption offences. At the same time, the ideas of the Russian propaganda are transmitted by "useful idiots" (persons adhering from conviction or because they lack correct information) and by conservative voters (not represented politically) as well or by those who did not benefit from the accession of Romania to the EU. The messages of the Russian propaganda are also disseminated by religious civil society organizations.

Referendum for Amending the Constitution

It was the event around which a huge amount of Russian propaganda ideas were disseminated at public opinion level and many civic, institutional and political actors were mobilized.

In 2015, several people coming from different professional environments created an Initiative committee in order to modify art. 48 of the Constitution¹², namely to clearly mention that in Romania marriage can only be concluded between partners of different genders. The Initiative committee included university professors, doctors, artists, writers, engineers, lawyers who had in common that they were Christian practitioners. The initiative was suggestively called the Coalition for Family (CfF) and many civil society organizations (mostly having Christian and pro-life profile) joined it. Soon, the initiative was (in)formally supported by the Romanian Orthodox Church and by other minor churches that helped for gathering approximately 2.7 million valid signatures for support¹³. The debates on the necessity to revise the fundamental law were initially maintained by churches, based on their traditional ideas about family and marriage. Later, they were fuelled by anti-Western Europe ideas promoted both by Russian mass media and by Facebook accounts and pages belonging to Christian NGOs. The main message disseminated was that if the Constitution is not amended, the homosexuals will marry and take

12 Art. 48 of the Romanian Constitution provides that (1) "The family is founded on the freely agreed marriage between spouses, on their equality and on the parents' right and duty to ensure children's raising, education and training".

The Civil Code provides that only partners of different genders can marry in Romania. At the same time, the Constitutional Court clarified in 2016 the term "spouses" mentioned in the text of the fundamental law, claiming that it refers to persons who do not have the same gender.

Constituția României, <https://www.constitutiaronaniei.ro/art-48-familia/>, accesat la 19.10.2018.

Decizia nr 580 din 20 iulie 2016, https://www.ccr.ro/files/products/Decizii_580.pdf, accesat la 19.10.2018.

13 Decizia nr 580 din 20 iulie 2016, https://www.ccr.ro/files/products/Decizii_580.pdf, accessed 19.10.2018.

the children of Romanians¹⁴. The revision of the fundamental law was justified, starting from the idea that Romania must engage in a battle for the future of the children and of the nation, even of the European civilization¹⁵. In order to support the arguments, the social networks, the CfF or Sputnik affiliated sites and the fake news sites as well have intensively broadcast videos or images intended to highlight the "moral decadence" of the Western states.

The referendum caused lively debates between the party that supported traditional values and the sympathizers of progressive ideas. This was used by the governing Social Democrat Party to distract attention from the attempts of the government and of the parliamentary majority to amend legislation in the field of justice, in order to help the Social-Democrats' president not to go to jail. The low presence of citizens at the referendum did not allow its validation. A few days after the referendum failed, the Initiative Committee of the Coalition for Family announced its dissolution.

CfF and Russia

Except for very similar narratives and for the relations¹⁶ established, starting from the affinity of ideas that exists between pro-life activists in Romania and those in Russia, there is no evidence that the CfF was financially supported by Moscow.

The news, the analyses and the Facebook comments of Romanian activists originate in the information published on the websites of conservative, Christian or pro-life publications in

14 VeDem Just: Referendumul nu e despre adopție. Homosexualii pot adopta copii în prezent, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/vedem-just-referendumul-nu-e-despre-adopție-homosexualii-pot-adopta-copii-in-prezent-1002493>, 25.09.2018, accessed 19.10.2018.

Mitropolitul Ardealului îndeamnă credincșii să participe la referendum: Dacă nu suntem 6 milioane, nu se aprobă, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/mitropolitul-ardealului-indeamna-credincosii-sa-participe-la-referendum-daca-nu-suntem-6-milioane-nu-se-aproba-996676>, 14.09.2018, accessed 19.11.2018.

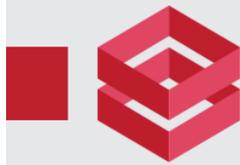
15 www.culturavietii.ro

16 The representatives of the ProVita NGO, which coordinated CfF's actions, participated in the pro-life events organized under the umbrella of the World Congress of the Family, in Moscow or in states of the European Union. Pro-Vita affiliated sites have published interviews or analyzes of pro-life activists from the Russian Federation, without mentioning that they perform their activities within organizations funded by Konstantin Malofeev, an oligarch included on the EU sanctions list for having financed the war in Ukraine and for having been involved in the annexation of Crimea.

Pro Vita activists involved in CfF coordination also participated in Agenda Europe meetings, a network of pro-life NGOs and supporters of "natural order" created in Western Europe benefitting from Russian, Azerbaijani financial support or from European conservative support. One of goals undertaken by Agenda Europe was to set up national lobbying networks to act at NGO and parliament levels in order to amend the constitutions that do not explicitly mention the marriage between persons having opposite genders.

Agenda Europe is an European subsidiary (or partner) of the World Congress of Families, created by Russians and Americans in Moscow in the late 1990s. WCF is represented in Russia by pro-life religious organizations funded by the oligarch Konstantin Malofeev.

Restoring the natural order. The religious extremists' vision to mobilize European societies against human rights on sexuality and reproduction, aprilie 2018, https://www.epfweb.org/sites/epfweb.org/files/rtno_epf_book_lores.pdf, accessed 19.10.2018.



ESGA

Experts for Security and Global Affairs

Western Europe. However, their stories are similar, sometimes even identical to those promoted by Russian propaganda.

Recommendations:

Romanian experts should encourage training programs dedicated to political developments in the Former Soviet space for the young generation of experts. Intercultural exchange opportunities with Russia should be used to the fullest to create real expertise that is not flawed by historical perceptions.

© Copyright by Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association (ESGA)

Bucharest, Romania

2018

www.esga.ro