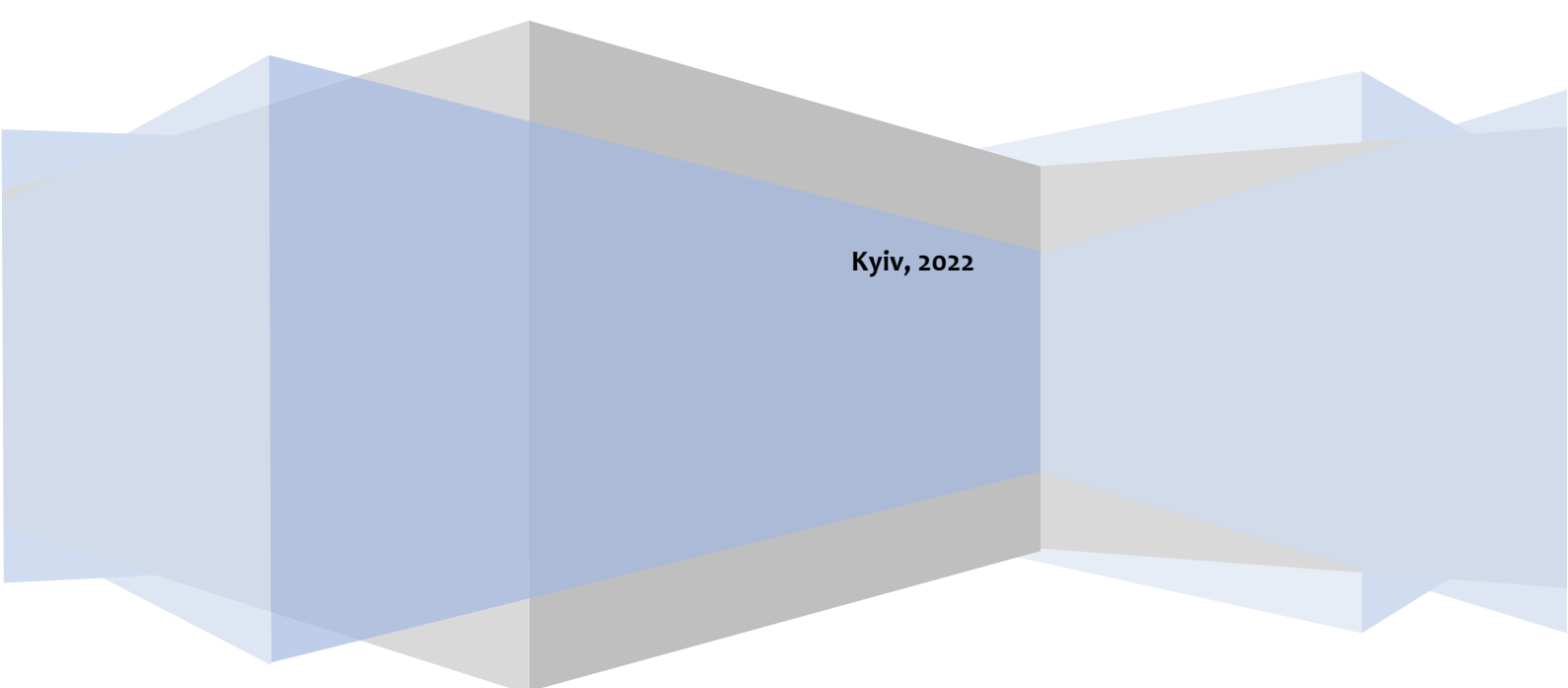


*Experts for Security and Global Affairs*

**Romania - US Political and Security Relations in the Wider Context  
of the Black Sea Region**

**Policy brief**

**Oleksandr Kraiev**



**Kyiv, 2022**

# Romania - US political and security relations in the wider context of the Black Sea region

By Oleksandr Kraiev<sup>1</sup>

## Intro<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, since the inauguration of President Donald Trump and continuing this trend all the way to the presidency of Joseph R. Biden, the United States has begun to pay more and more attention to Romania in the context of its own interests in Central and Eastern Europe. This interest was primarily due to Romania's significant role in the security system of NATO's eastern flank and Romania's importance to the economic and security architecture of the Black Sea region. For example, the multinational brigade in Craiova, for which Romania is a framework nation, forms the land component of the forward presence. Currently, ten allies - Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal - have committed to it, contributing to the brigade headquarters and coordinating enhanced training. In addition, Romania is the country responsible for air policing activities in the Black Sea region under NATO auspices.

Secondly, the energy sector is an important component of cooperation between the two countries. Official US sources - namely, the State Department - say that energy attracts the most American investment in Romania and is the area where American companies are most involved in the country<sup>3</sup>. Further development of relations in this area, especially in promising projects for exploration of new gas-bearing areas and strengthening infrastructure, is obviously of interest to both countries.

The full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, was the biggest factor in raising the issue of cooperation in all available areas. In addition to the fact that Moscow's aggressive position poses direct security challenges, it has also provoked literally continental shifts in energy security and a revision of the energy supply chain for Europe. Therefore, at this stage, Romania's cooperation with the United States requires a more detailed study and delineation of certain promising projects. From the point of view of the United States, it has a greater strategic logic. In addition to close historical and cultural ties, Romania is one of the most consistently **pro-American** nations in Europe and in the world. According to a 2018 European poll, 78% of **Romanians** view the United States favorably. This is the second-highest pro-American sentiment in the **European Union**, after **Poland**.<sup>[2]</sup> Another poll showed that a very large percentage of Romanians, 87%, want future US ambassadors to Bucharest to continue supporting the fight

---

<sup>1</sup> **Oleksandr Kraiev**, is the director of the North America program in the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism". He is an international relations columnist for several Ukrainian and international media outlets. He is also a PhD candidate at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Key academic and professional spheres of interest: the UK and US foreign and domestic policy, the Irish border dispute, hybrid warfare, and modern conflicts.

<sup>2</sup> This policy brief is developed within the project "**Romanian – Ukrainian Civil Society Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation. Third edition**", implemented by the Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association, Romania, in partnership with Strategic and Security Studies Group and Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian PRISM", Ukraine, with the support of Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, a project of the German Marshall Fund. The views expressed in this policy paper are those of the author and do not necessarily coincide with those of ESGA partners.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-romania/>

against [corruption](#) in Romania. The same poll showed that 74% of Romanians want the United States to remain the main strategic partner of Romania.<sup>[3]</sup> Thus, Romania has every prospect of becoming one of the key American allies in the region.

### **US-Romania economic ties: general overview**

In 2019, the United States ranked as the fifth largest foreign investor in Romania when European subsidiaries of American companies were taken into account.<sup>4</sup> Almost one in ten of Romania's biggest 500 companies by turnover are part of U.S. groups or represent American brands, according to an analysis by Romania-Insider.com, based on financial data from Romania's Trade Registry's Office (ONRC).<sup>5</sup> The sectors where big American corporations are most active in Romania are automotive, agriculture (mostly trading of agricultural products), pharmaceuticals, consumer goods, and IT&C.

The latest data provided via official databases of US State Department suggests that total amount of direct American investments into Romania is exceeding 2.5 billion US dollars, which constitutes in absolute figures nearly 1.5% of Romanian GDP<sup>6</sup>.

In 2020, the United States exported \$980M to Romania. During the last 25 years the exports of United States to Romania have increased at an annualized rate of 3.75%, from \$391M in 1995 to \$980M in 2020<sup>7</sup>. However, in the last two years there has been a downward trend in trade between Romania and the United States - in both directions. According to the United States Census Bureau, between January and March 2022, mutual trade between the United States and Romania fell by more than 5% compared to the same period last year and almost 10% compared to the end of last year.

Today, infrastructure has become an important part of economic cooperation between the two countries. According to the US State Department, Washington is currently looking at infrastructure as an area of specific interest in its involvement of the Three Seas Initiative<sup>8</sup>. Russia's aggression against Ukraine also includes an absolute blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports and the impossibility of supplying Ukrainian goods, primarily agricultural goods. In the absence of an initiative from leading Western countries to take measures to directly influence the Russian blockade, an alternative to developing the capacity of Romanian port services looks like an adequate alternative to other strategies.

However, energy remains a key area of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Romania. According to the US State Department, energy is a key area of interest for American

---

<sup>4</sup> "U.S. Relations With Romania" by U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-romania/>

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Justice. National Trade Register Office. Official website. <https://www.onrc.ro/index.php/en/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-investment-climate-statements/romania/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/usa/partner/rou>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-romania/>

investors in Romania and remains one of the key areas of bilateral government cooperation<sup>9</sup>. Currently, the flagship project is undoubtedly the development of deepwater drilling within the joint project of Romgaz and Exxon Mobil called Neptun Deep. Rising energy prices in Europe due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine only increases the investment attractiveness of this project. The prospect holds an estimated 100 billion cubic meters of gas, roughly equal to Norway's annual output<sup>10</sup>. The full start of the project is planned for 2026, but by the end of this year the consortium plans to issue bonds worth more than 500 euros to attract investment and potentially reduce the deadlines for launching the project. In fact, Neptun Deep is an illustrative pattern of the potential for cooperation between American capital and Romanian state-owned energy companies.

Another viable topic is liquefied natural gas (LNG). In April this year, Romgaz held talks with NewMed Energy, a Delek group company, on the possible signing of a contract for the supply of Israeli LNG through Egypt to the relevant terminals in Romania<sup>11</sup>. The prospect of such cooperation in times of energy crisis is certainly a positive example of a multi-source approach to energy security. Given the latest similar agreements between the US and Bulgaria, this kind of approach can become a backbone of the region's security architecture in the reality without Russia as a valid player.

However, in previous years, there have been reports that Turkey will not allow LNG supplies for Ukraine through the Black Sea Straits "due to threats to the environment and the protection of historical heritage<sup>12</sup>." However, in the User's Guide of Turkish Straits Vessel Traffic Service of 2020 and in Guidelines for Transiting the Turkish Straits of 2021 there are direct instructions for transporting LNG through the straits. According to User's Guide of Turkish Straits, special pilotage services are required for LNG tankers, which also receive special status together with nuclear powered vessels<sup>13</sup>. At the same time in Guidelines it is said that (LNG) vessels bound for Marmara ports have priority over other vessels according to Turkish Straits rules, other types of vessels do not have such priority<sup>14</sup>. Evidentially, the Turkish position is exclusively concerning the Ukrainian prospects of receiving LNG stockpiles.

### **Military and security: collective security and joint activities**

As noted in the introduction, Romania does play an important role in the strategic approach of the United States to the security of the Black Sea region. In turn, Bucharest sees the United States as one of the key partners in security cooperation, and it is these contacts that largely determine the narratives of security cooperation in the region. At the same time, from the US point

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-romania/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-25/romania-mulls-accelerating-deepwater-gas-project-as-prices-surge?fbclid=IwAR2pouGd8NdKWUt2Ls6kIH1Y1aqIOEX2U7WGIvU5h1\\_BLQC7VrJcJnRiOAU](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-25/romania-mulls-accelerating-deepwater-gas-project-as-prices-surge?fbclid=IwAR2pouGd8NdKWUt2Ls6kIH1Y1aqIOEX2U7WGIvU5h1_BLQC7VrJcJnRiOAU)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.offshore-energy.biz/omv-petrom-delivers-lng-to-fuel-romania's-first-lng-operated-ship/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/natural-gas/can-ukraine-receive-lng-via-the-bosphorus/11002>

<sup>13</sup>

[https://kiyiemniyeti.gov.tr/Data/1/Files/Document/Documents/9S/6R/yY/wu/TSVTS\\_User\\_Guide\\_21.05.20.pdf](https://kiyiemniyeti.gov.tr/Data/1/Files/Document/Documents/9S/6R/yY/wu/TSVTS_User_Guide_21.05.20.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.maritimecyprus.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/OCIMFguidelines-for-transiting-the-turkish-straits.pdf>

of view, Romania is a key NATO member state among the Black Sea states, which has a strong pro-American position and contributes to the active strengthening of the region's security. Turkey's unstable and often politicized position, despite its key geographical position in control of the Black Sea Straits, gives Romania the upper hand.

The basis for joint security projects is a common framework for cooperation within NATO's Eastern Flank. However, it should be noted that the US military does not participate in multinational brigades - as in, for example, the already mentioned multinational brigade in Craiova - and mostly deploys its own contingents. As of the beginning of 2022, there were 800 US troops in Romania on a permanent basis, including the personnel for air policing mission at Fetesti Air Base near the strategically important Danube river delta<sup>15</sup>.

Although the main focus of bilateral cooperation is on strengthening the air potential of the Romanian army as a key element in providing elements of intelligence and deterrence in the region, much attention should also be paid to the creation of an infrastructure hub on its territory. The direct Russian invasion of Ukraine forced Romania to reconsider its role in the region's security system, and almost immediately it became actively involved not only in providing humanitarian and economic assistance to Ukrainian refugees, but also in supporting US military initiatives. For example, one of the first consignments of heavy American howitzer artillery arrived in Romania before being delivered to Ukraine<sup>16</sup>.

Expanding Romania's technical and infrastructural potential as a key eastern flank will significantly strengthen security in the Black Sea region. The main provisions of such reinforcement should be the rearmament of new weapons, the expansion of existing military infrastructure, the establishment of a system of support and repair bases to support long-term patrol and deterrence operations in both air and sea areas of the Black Sea.

The uncertain and reactive position of official Ankara leads us to state that in the light of the security of the region, Romania can take the place of a more predictable and stable partner for security projects in the United States.

### **Prospects for growth and mutual benefit**

To date, a series of political and social crises - the largest of which is undoubtedly the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops - have provoked an extremely volatile situation in the world's energy markets. Particular attention should be paid to the European energy market, where additional severe sanctions have been imposed in response to Russia's illegal and illicit aggression.

At the time of writing, the European Union has already agreed on a sixth sanctions package, which also included restrictions on the energy sector, namely:

- The EU decided to prohibit the purchase, import or transfer of crude oil and certain petroleum products from Russia into the EU;

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.airforcemag.com/repositioning-of-russian-forces-in-ukraine-creates-nightmare-scenario-for-romania/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.legion.org/news/255598/first-american-howitzers-bound-ukraine-arrive-europe-us-troops-begin-training-ukrainians>

- The phasing out of Russian oil will take from 6 months for crude oil to 8 months for other refined petroleum products<sup>17</sup>.

However, a temporary exception was foreseen for imports of crude oil by pipeline into those EU member states that, due to their geographic situation, suffer from a specific dependence on Russian supplies and have no viable alternative options.

Thus, potentially successful and promising projects at the level of bilateral relations between the United States and Romania within the Black Sea region<sup>18</sup> are as follows:

**1. Carry out the planned technical exchange of F-16 for updated F-35**

Romania's combat aircraft consist of 17 F-16s and a small number of upgraded MiG-21 Lancers. While Romania has ordered 48 total secondhand F-16s with a stated eventual transition to the F-35, most of its F-16s have not been delivered. Romanian pilots also require additional training before they can take on combat missions<sup>19</sup>. As noted in this brief, Romania is responsible for air-patrolling the Black Sea region. In the context of intensifying Russian aggression and blocking the Black Sea by the Russian Navy, it is necessary to ensure more active remilitarization of the allies of the Eastern Flank to deter potential aggression.

**2. Development of the Neptun Deep project and expansion of its infrastructure potential**

The economic and political benefits of the project described above will allow not only to economically justify more active investment but also to further expand cooperation with Exxon Mobil and other US contractors in the field of deepwater drilling and exploration of new fields.

**3. Continuation of the project to create infrastructure for liquefied natural gas and the development of cooperation and procurement of American LNG**

Given the positive case of such cooperation between the United States and Bulgaria, it is possible to consider the possibility of similar cooperation between Washington and Bucharest.

In addition, it is important to understand that most of these proposals and the projects mentioned in this note can be extended to a wider region, including very proactively and profitably involving Ukraine. For example, Ukraine has long stated the possibility and desire to develop liquefied natural gas infrastructure, but has received constant refusals and reservations from Turkey in a very selective position of rejection.

Ukraine's involvement in military infrastructure expansion projects will also be promising, both within the framework of cooperation with Romania and within the framework of Ukraine-NATO cooperation.

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/03/russia-s-aggression-against-ukraine-eu-adopts-sixth-package-of-sanctions/>

<sup>18</sup>These are projects that, having been developed at the bilateral level, will have a positive impact on the political, economic and / or security situation in the wider Black Sea region.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.airforcemag.com/repositioning-of-russian-forces-in-ukraine-creates-nightmare-scenario-for-romania/>

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

**Bucharest, Romania**

**2022**

**[www.esga.ro](http://www.esga.ro)**