

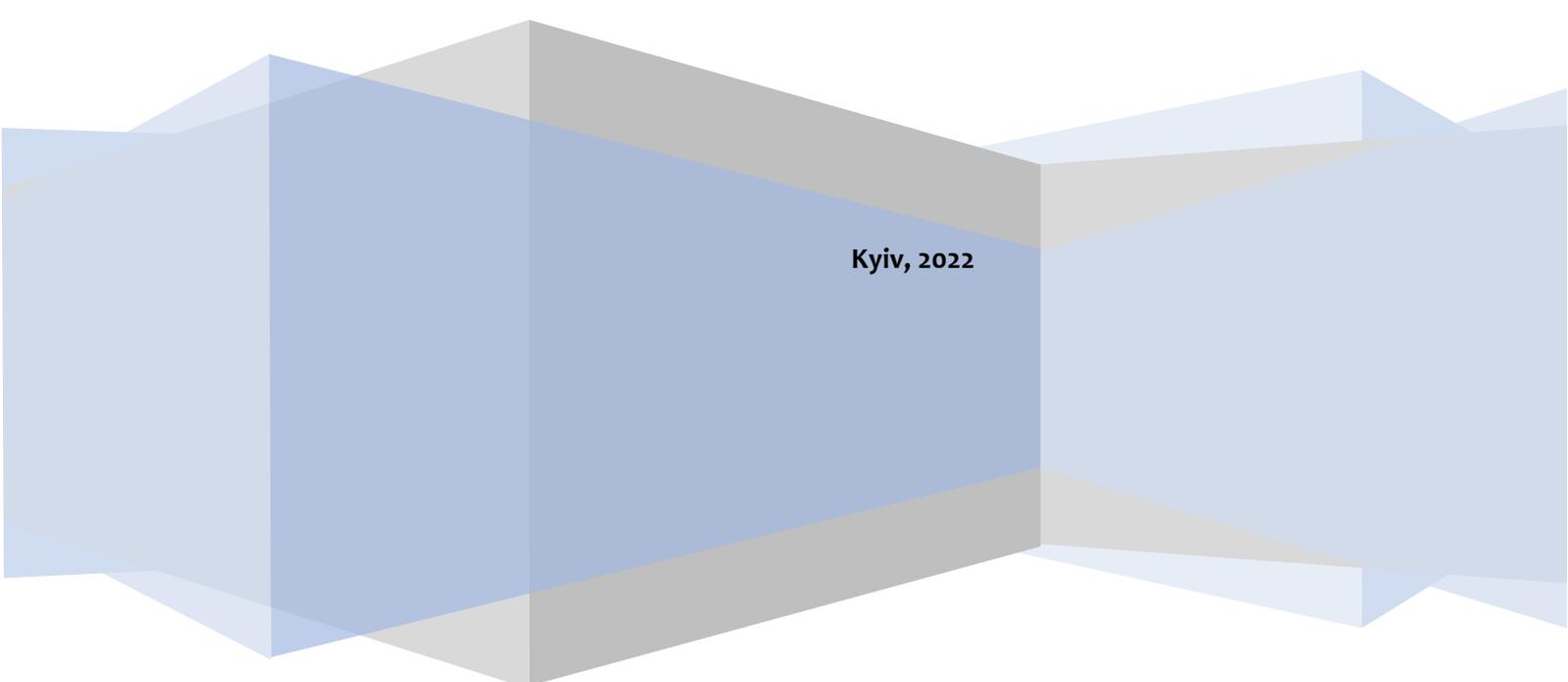
*Experts for Security and Global Affairs*

**Ukraine-Romania Cooperation under NATO umbrella  
(in the context of Russian military expansion in Europe)**

**Policy brief**

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## **Ukraine-Romania Cooperation under NATO umbrella**

### **(in the context of Russian military expansion in Europe)**

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The general understanding of security and key threats in the neighborhood and in the Wider Black Sea region went through a process of significant evolution in Romania<sup>3</sup>. The Russian aggression first against in Georgia in 2008 and then in Ukraine starting from 2014 and with a high point in 2022 have triggered the process of such evolution. Bucharest has put its stakes on Trans-Atlantic solidarity, strengthening its ties with the United States, and focusing on meeting NATO's requirements. Militarization of the Black Sea region is perceived as a challenge to Romania's national security and the attempts to adjust to the new realities with the available security tools are the main factors shaping Romanian strategic thinking.<sup>4</sup>

Romania as well as many regional and global actors was rather focusing on the military conflicts outside the European continent, terrorism and weapons proliferation. The Russian war against Georgia did not play a game-changing role. However, Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 became a wake-up call for the country. The National Defence Strategy 2015-2019<sup>5</sup> adopted soon after the Russian invasion to Ukraine and occupation of Crimea reflects the changes. Russia is mentioned in the document as the country that has tensed relations with NATO and deterioration in the relations has direct impact on Romanian citizens' security. Therefore, Bucharest underlined that it shared the concerns of its NATO allies, condemned violation of the international agreements signed by Russia and highlighted the importance of the collective defence under NATO's umbrella.

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<sup>3</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>4</sup> <http://prismua.org/en/english-romania-security-strategies-and-policies-after-2014/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/Defence-Procurement-Gateway/national-defense-strategy-2015---2019.pdf>

Romanian National Defense Strategy for 2020-2024<sup>6</sup> goes even further. The document says that the Russian Federation's aggressive behavior, the actions to militarize the Black Sea region, as well as their hybrid actions carried out with the purpose of maintaining a tense climate of insecurity in the proximity of Romania, prove that the extensive of building robust deterrence and defense capabilities has to be accelerated. Contrary to the speculations of the Western international relations theorists who were hesitant regarding the roots of the "Ukraine Crisis"<sup>7</sup>, the Romanian leadership firmly outlined that the attitude and actions of the Russian Federation carried out in violation of international law lead to continued and extended divergences with a number of Western and NATO states and, represents a serious obstacle to identifying viable solutions for stability and predictability of the security environment. The potential for escalation of the existing tensions in the region, amid the strengthening of the offensive position and aggressiveness/assertiveness of the Russian Federation in recent years was recognized as a major security concern at national level.

The document also says that the constant actions of the Russian Federation to strengthen its own offensive military capabilities in the Black Sea, and its active posture to unbalance Allied military capabilities on NATO Eastern flank calls for a reinforced national defense posture and Romania's active role in order to strengthen the Allied deterrence and defense posture in the region.

Romanian leadership was also quite critical toward NATO's delayed reaction to the new realities on its Eastern flank. The delays in the Alliance's adaptation processes to the threats in its Eastern and Southern neighborhood were assessed as such that had the potential to negatively influence the Romania's security situation.

Romania has not only outlined its concerns in the strategic documents but also participated in the number of initiatives could have improved the security situation in the region. One of the most promising initiatives was the idea of launching the Black Sea flotilla. Political and military support of the US administration and the idea of NATO Black Sea naval cooperation (flotilla), regardless of whether it is originated in Romania, were voiced in February 2016 by the US Ambassador to Romania.<sup>8</sup> Although Romania had a relatively small navy, with its largest warship a Type 56 frigate, it could have served as a hub because of the port of Constanta which was regularly used by allied forces as a strategic hub to launch operations into the Black Sea and beyond. Romania also welcomed the idea of the participation of Ukraine and Georgia in the activities of the aforementioned flotilla. That was a friendly step since it proved that Romania is not trying to use the moment for monopolizing its role in the Black Sea but seeks for the broad cooperation with the other interested parties. Romania expected the issue to be discussed at the NATO's Warsaw summit however it was blocked by Bulgaria that time. Eventually, the idea may reincarnate within the newly emerging strategic context. In a longer time, perspective NATO minesweepers flotilla may be needed.<sup>9</sup>

At the Brussels Summit in 2018, NATO's communique began to outline further areas of engagement in strengthening Black Sea security: reinforcing allied maritime posture, increasing NATO's presence and activity, and developing cooperation between the alliance and its partners: Georgia and Ukraine. The Tailored Forward Presence (tFP) in the Black Sea region was established.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from the increase in military spending Romania has also persuaded its NATO allies to increase the Alliance's presence in the Black Sea. According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in February 2017 NATO has taken the decision to complement its strengthened regional posture in the air and on land – based on a multinational framework brigade in Romania. Eight allies have committed to provide brigade staff

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National\\_Defence\\_Strategy\\_2020\\_2024.pdf](https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National_Defence_Strategy_2020_2024.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>

<sup>8</sup> <https://popups.uliege.be/2593-9483/index.php?id=141>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-to-break-russias-blockade-of-ukraines-black-sea-ports/2022/05/29/2cd240c2-df26-11ec-bc35-a91d0a94923b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-to-break-russias-blockade-of-ukraines-black-sea-ports/2022/05/29/2cd240c2-df26-11ec-bc35-a91d0a94923b_story.html)

<sup>10</sup> <https://cepa.org/nato-back-in-the-black-sea/>

and five allies have committed land and air forces for training and air policing. It was also decided to take two additional maritime measures: an increased NATO naval presence in the Black Sea for enhanced training, exercises and situational awareness, and a maritime coordination function for NATO's Standing Naval Forces when operating with other Allied forces in the Black Sea region.<sup>11</sup> Nowadays, following NATO's decision to bolster its troop presence on its eastern flank, Romania is hosting a multinational battle group comprised by French, Belgian and Dutch soldiers, as well as a US contingent.<sup>12</sup>

Besides, in 2016, Romania received nine F-16 fighter jets from Portugal<sup>13</sup> as part of a program that aims to replace the country's Soviet-era Russian-made MiGs with combat aircraft that comply with NATO standards. In December 2021 the Romanian MoD moved forward requested the parliament's preliminary approval for the acquisition of more than 40-year-old F-16s from the Norwegian Royal Air Force. Aside from Norway, the Romanian defense ministry discussed purchasing used F-16s from various NATO members, including Denmark, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, and the Netherlands.<sup>14</sup> In June 2022 the Romanian government adopted a bill on buying 32 used F-16 fighter jets from Norway.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Romania purchased HIMARS surface-to-surface missile launchers from US manufacturer Lockheed Martin three years ago for USD 1,5 billion. Mounted on a truck, each missile system has 18 launching pads and can hit a target from 300 km away.<sup>16</sup> Also in 2020 the Romanian army received its first shipment of U.S. Raytheon Patriot surface-to-air missiles.<sup>17</sup> The missiles form part of an integrated air defense system comprising acquired F-16 fighter jets.

Starting from 2023 Romania plans to launch its helicopter program whereas in July Romanian MoD announced its plans to purchase French Scorpene submarines. Besides, it is expected that Romania will produce "SkyCeptor" missiles for the Patriot systems at the Romarm manufacturing plant.<sup>18</sup>

While focusing on security threats rooted in Russian aggressive behavior, strengthening bonds with the US and looking for the regional allies Romania also contributed into launching regional security formats. Bucharest Nine was one of them. The Bucharest Nine (hereafter B9) brings together nine NATO member states located on the NATO's Eastern flank: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and. It was founded in the Romanian capital, Bucharest, in November 2015 on the initiative of Romania and Poland.

Beside for establishing closer ties between the countries of the NATO's Eastern flank the regional initiative also keeps close contact with the United States. On December 9, 2021, soon after the talks with Vladimir Putin, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke with the B9 leaders to underscore the United States' commitment to Transatlantic security and to NATO's Article 5. The leaders discussed Russia's destabilizing military buildup along Ukraine's border and the need for a united, ready, and resolute NATO stance for the collective defense of Allies.<sup>19</sup> On June 10, 2022, Joe Biden, also talked to the leaders of B9 who assembled in Bucharest for a summit. According to some sources, in the message conveyed to the leaders present at the

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.romania-insider.com/nato-strengthens-naval-presence-in-the-black-sea>

<sup>12</sup> <https://financialpost.com/pmn/business-pmn/nato-must-dig-in-for-long-deployment-in-east-romania-warns>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/romania-receives-final-f-16-from-portugal>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/12/13/romania-f16-contract-norway/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://mil.in.ua/en/news/romania-to-buy-f-16-fighter-jets-from-norway/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.romania-insider.com/ro-tests-himars-jun-2022#:~:text=Romania%20purchased%20three%20HIMARS%20surface,rocket%20system%20arrive%20in%20Romania>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-romania-defence-usa-patriot-idUKKBN2681K6>

<sup>18</sup> [https://lb.ua/world/2022/07/26/524244\\_yak\\_posilyuyutsya\\_kraini\\_ievropi\\_tli.html](https://lb.ua/world/2022/07/26/524244_yak_posilyuyutsya_kraini_ievropi_tli.html)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/09/readout-of-president-bidens-call-with-the-leaders-of-the-bucharest-nine-eastern-flank-nato-allies/>

B9 Summit, the US President evoked the fact that the B9 states were at the forefront of the Euro-Atlantic community's collective response to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression in Ukraine.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that NATO remains a priority for Bucharest. However, B9 possesses certain potential to strengthen NATO's efforts on the Eastern flank. Bearing in mind Russian aggression and threats it causes to stability, development and security of Central and Eastern Europe, international positioning and behavior and common security policy of the B9 countries proves that launching this format was a correct strategic response of the CEE states (belonging to the EU and NATO) to Russian brutal aggression against Ukraine. B9 states got the proofs that modern Russian revanchism is not a tricky bluff of Moscow but rather it is rooted in its values and with the support of propaganda tools is a founding stone of the powers legitimacy and authority. It is a guideline which shapes Russian vision of its historical perspective. Therefore Russia gives clear messages that even after absorbing Ukraine it would not limit its appetites and will further destabilize situation in vulnerable subregions of Central and Eastern Europe and may further use the tool of military aggression as it happens in Ukraine. Russian ambitious plans of expansion to Europe and of ruining democracy and freedom, destroying European Union, NATO etc. have been prevented from implementation.

Aside from strengthening its own security capabilities, ties with the Euro-Atlantic partners and with the regional like-minded partners Romania also has not neglected joint drills organized in the region with the third countries including Ukraine. Just in the recent years both Romania and Ukraine participated in the following drills:

- Riverine tactical military exercises (with the participation of Romania and Ukraine);
- Light Avalanche tabletop military exercises (with the participation of Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine, based on the Tysa Multinational Engineering Battalion);
- Combined Resolve tactical military exercises (with the participation of Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine);
- Agile Spirit tactical military exercises (with the participation of Poland, Romania, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Ukraine);
- Dive tactical navy and salvage exercises (with the participation of Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine)

Already in May 2022 Romania co-hosted TrojanFootprint 22 NATO drills. The drills were planned and coordinated by the Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) and aimed at offering the participating units the opportunity to test and demonstrate "multi-domain"-type tactics, techniques and procedures which involved sets of professional abilities specific to the land, air and naval Special Operations Forces soldiers.

Bearing in mind common vision of threats in the region, common perception and understanding of Russian revanchism and chauvenism ideas, sharing the desire to counteract Russian aggression and to strengthen security by means of increasing defense budgets, purchasing and producing weapons and ammunition, and supporting closer Trans-Atlantic ties and solidarity in the region, Ukraine and Romania are natural allies in this historical period and can support each other bilaterally and in wider regional formats as develop strategic partnership ties actively.

First and foremost, Ukraine would benefit from Romania's support in Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic path. Despite for the wide discussion and Russian demands it seems that Ukraine's integration to NATO is the only way to reach security guarantees in the future. Moreover, Ukraine's Western allies are seeking for the formulas that would permit joining NATO without direct risk of involving NATO into the war with Russia. For example, a former US State Department Special Representative on Ukraine Kurt Walker suggests that NATO might sign an agreement that the Article 5 would not be applied to the occupied territories, with

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.agerpres.ro/english/2022/06/10/b9-summit-president-biden-to-nato-leaders-meeting-in-bucharest-us-pledges-to-defend-eastern-flank--932896>

Ukraine (as well as with Georgia or Moldova). Such agreements would include the commitment not to be the first who use force to bring the occupied territories back and to support only the peaceful reintegration of these territories and the integrity restoration of the countries which aspire to join NATO. This should deprive Russia of the incentives to continue the occupation of these territories.<sup>21</sup>

Also, cooperation within the B9 format with the participation of Ukraine can be and should be promoted. Bucharest can contribute into opening a window of opportunity for engaging Ukraine and shaping B9+ format. Such format can formalize mutual assistance and solidarity in countering Russian military expansion to Ukraine and potentially to the other countries of the region. Such format with the support of other allies (most of all the US and the UK) would decrease the risks while elaborating solidarity oriented approaches and taking concrete steps for deterring Russia. It can also contribute into security and defense resilience of the NATO's Eastern Flank.

In this regard it makes sense to focus on the following dimensions of cooperation and enhanced strategic partnership of Ukraine and Romania:

- Launching a regular format of meetings of the Heads of MoDs of the B9+Ukraine for exchanging information, shaping common vision and common responses to the security challenges and threats coming from Russia;
- Bearing in mind the existing level of solidarity and mutual understanding between the B9 it can be effective to apply diplomatic and political efforts to semi-formalize the club of the supporters of the Ukraine's NATO membership. Gaining the support of the group of countries would increase Ukraine's chances in persuading skeptical NATO members;
- Initiating recruiting of the military specialists in the B9 countries to fill the gaps and strengthen capacities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine;
- Developing the security identity of the region based on common understanding of the regionally driven understanding of the responsibility for ensuring regional security and promoting understanding of the necessity to spread NATO's responsibility beyond the territories of the member-states to the that states that share the values of free and rules bases society, belong to the democratic world and face unprovoked military aggression from third countries;

Furthermore, the joint efforts of B9 and other smaller regional formats can be of added value. By these formats we mean Visegrad Group, Lublin Triangle (the Lublin Triangle was established in July 2020 by the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, who signed the joint declaration on the establishment of a new regional alliance. Among the priorities of the format is the reinforcement of the region, security enhancement, Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO, development of economic cooperation, joint counteraction to hybrid threats), Ukraine-Türkiye quadriga (The term 'quadriga' stands for 2+2 format meeting of foreign ministers and defense ministers of Ukraine and Türkiye) and potentially emerging quartet of Poland-Romania-Ukraine and Türkiye.

The catalyzing event for enhancing such joint efforts can be the joint summit of B9 and Lublin Triangle with the participation of the other NATO states and the EU. The expert community should also initiate launching of the B9 Expert Forum which can potentially provide analytical support in the process of the assessment of regional risks/threats.

In terms of bilateral cooperation it makes sense to pay more attention to the military-industrial cooperation of two countries. Romania has a rich background in weapons manufacturing as well as Ukraine

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.promoteukraine.org/ukraine-could-join-nato-despite-the-russias-aggression/>  
53 Diaconu Coresi Str., Bucharest, Romania  
Web: [www.esga.ro](http://www.esga.ro), E-mail: [contact@esga.ro](mailto:contact@esga.ro)

does. Before the 1989 revolution Romania became one of the top ten weapons exporters in that period.<sup>22</sup> Nowadays Romania has raised the question of reviving the industry. It plans to design and build military aircraft, military drones and mini-submarines in the following years. The strong sides of Romania in this regard are:

- Romania's status as a member of NATO and the EU, enabling defense companies to cooperate with major manufacturers of military equipment in technologically developed countries;
- Romania's ownership of an efficient export control system for military products and technologies, recognized by the US and EU Member States; Romania is the regional leader in export control (established in 1992);
- Access to European non-refundable external financing mechanisms aimed at modernizing the defense industry of the Member States of the European Union.

In its turn, Ukraine also has rich tradition of weapons production. One of the recent success stories is R-360 Neptune anti-ship missiles, which caused the sinking of the Russians' Black Sea flagship, the Moskva. R-360 Neptune is sixteen feet long and weighing 1,920 pounds with a 330-pound warhead, the Neptune could be fired up to 16 miles from the coastline, with a maximum range of 190 miles. Although its 900-kilometer-per-hour speed is subsonic, the missile has the potential to foil enemy radar by flying at altitudes of 10 to 15 meters, or even as low as 3 to 10 meters.<sup>23</sup> The Vilkhavik Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) which entered serial production phase in 2019 is another achievement. developed by the State Kyiv Design Bureau "Luch" in collaboration with other public and private Ukrainian defense companies. The MLRS can destroy infantry, armored, and soft-skinned targets in concentration areas of artillery batteries, command posts, and ammunition depots. It is ten times more accurate than the ageing MLRS platforms in service with the Ukrainian Army.<sup>24</sup>

Combining Ukrainian technologies tested in the battlefield and Romania's tradition accompanied by the NATO members state status can bring the results and attract the investments, bearing in mind that Russia's invasion of Ukraine intensifies military spending worldwide. Moreover, military industrial cooperation between the two states corresponds with the strategic partnership goal and can be trend-setting for the wider region and if accompanied with the afore-recommended B9+ format can create another driver for the region's investment attractiveness. Moreover, solidarity and common understanding of the threats by the countries of the region will may create the reliable supply chains necessary for the security and defense cooperation. Engaging Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey and the Baltic States can be an asset.

Summarizing, both Ukraine and Romania have a lot in common from the security and defense perspective. Combining the efforts of two countries can be of mutual interest and benefit. Solidarity and trust between the two can drive further cooperation in the region among the NATO member-states (in particular B9 states but also beyond them) and contribute into enhanced security for the NATO's Eastern flank and for Ukraine.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-wants-produce-military-aircraft>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.militarytimes.com/off-duty/gearscout/2022/05/12/the-neptune-anti-ship-missile-the-weapon-that-may-have-sunk-the-russian-flagship-moskva/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.army-technology.com/projects/vilkha-m-multiple-launch-rocket-system/>

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