

ROMANIA'S NEW SECURITY GEOMETRY: POST-VILNIUS B9, REGIONAL SOLIDARITY AND THE NORTH-ATLANTIC AXIS

Policy brief

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Between Failed Solidarity and Functional Alliances: The B9 in Strategic Transition¹

The Bucharest Nine (B9) Format Summit, held in Vilnius in 2025, offered a troubling snapshot of the strategic cohesion along NATO's eastern flank. Although the meeting aimed to reaffirm the B9 states' commitment to supporting Ukraine and strengthening deterrence against Russian threats, only three countries — Romania, Poland, and Lithuania — signed the final declaration. Major divergences among the participants, including the reserved positions of countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, clearly pointed to a growing regional fragmentation.

A particularly significant development was the invitation extended to the Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) to participate in the summit. Their presence, alongside the NATO Secretary General and Ukrainian President Zelensky, transformed the summit into an expanded platform for dialogue between the Eastern Flank and the Allied North. The participation of the Nordic countries highlighted a natural convergence of strategic interests between the Baltic-Carpathian and North Atlantic states, particularly in the areas of land and maritime defence, energy security, cyber resilience, and risk mitigation in the face of threats from the Russian Federation.

In this context, Romania now has both the opportunity and the responsibility to redefine its strategic geometry. The weakening of the B9 format compels Bucharest to redirect its security policy towards functional and effective partnerships. A North-Atlantic security axis, alongside the United States, Poland, and the Nordic countries, offers Romania a coherent framework to strengthen its strategic profile within NATO and in the Black Sea region. This partnership must be grounded in doctrinal convergence, interoperability, and shared objectives for collective defence.

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Romania's strategic repositioning will require active diplomatic engagement in the Nordic capitals and in Washington, as well as the intensification of bilateral and trilateral defence cooperation. Substantial investments are needed in Romania's own military capabilities and in the development of joint armament strategies with the Nordic countries, including in areas such as military drones, air defence, and dual-use technologies. These efforts must be supported by a predictable budgetary allocation, in line with the commitments announced by the President of Romania, and by a new foreign policy clearly articulated around the North–Atlantic axis.

The B9 and the Eastern Flank: From Solidarity to Divergence

The Bucharest Nine (B9) Format was established in 2015 at the initiative of the Presidents of Romania and Poland, in response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the deteriorating security environment in Eastern Europe. The primary aim of the B9 was to strengthen regional cohesion among the NATO eastern flank states (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary) in order to coordinate security and defence positions and to support a robust Allied presence against Russian threats.

This year's summit in Vilnius provided B9 member states with a renewed opportunity to align their positions amid the protracted war in Ukraine and the increasing hybrid and conventional threats posed by Russia, as well as to calibrate their stances ahead of the NATO summit in The Hague. However, political divergences among B9 members became apparent: only Romania, Poland, and Lithuania signed the final declaration, which advocates firm support for Ukraine and the acceleration of its Euro-Atlantic integration. The absence of signatures from other states highlighted emerging fissures within the Allied eastern front and raised questions about the future viability of the B9 as a cohesive regional defence platform.

At the same time, the participation of the Nordic countries in the Vilnius summit demonstrated a natural openness towards a broader strategic convergence between the

Eastern and Northern flanks, at a moment when regional cohesion is becoming essential for NATO's collective security. With the involvement of these partners, as well as NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte and Ukraine, the summit underscored the need to build a more robust and flexible common front, capable of addressing the new challenges in the Euro-Atlantic region. For Romania, this context creates an opportunity to recalibrate its foreign and defence policy by actively orienting itself towards a North-Atlantic security axis, thereby making a decisive contribution to strengthening the collective security of NATO's eastern flank.

Strategic Fragility and Political Coherence

This summit provided a clear picture of the growing fragmentation of regional cohesion along NATO's eastern flank. Divergences in positions regarding support for Ukraine and tensions related to alliance governance demonstrated that a significant portion of Central and Southeastern European states exhibit an increasingly fluctuating commitment to collective security objectives. In contrast, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, and the Nordic countries have consistently and firmly affirmed their support for Ukraine, the strengthening of the northeastern flank, and the reinforcement of NATO as a deterrence and defence alliance. This group of states thus provides a necessary strategic counterbalance in a regional context increasingly marked by ambiguity and deadlock.

In the current geopolitical climate, the United States' trust in its European allies is increasingly conditioned by predictability, capability, and genuine commitment to defence and security. Washington views with concern the misalignment of certain European actors and seeks to strengthen cooperation with those states that demonstrate strategic coherence and the capacity to contribute meaningfully to collective defence. In this context, Romania has a clear opportunity: by consolidating its bilateral relationship with the US and anchoring itself within a core group of capable and committed states alongside Poland and the Nordic partners, Bucharest can become a trusted trans-regional actor within the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

However, this repositioning requires a strategic recalibration of Romania's foreign policy. Moving away from a predominantly regional role focused on the dynamics of the eastern flank and fragile multilateral constructs, Romania must embrace a trans-regional profile. This entails intensifying dialogue and cooperation not only within NATO but also through flexible formats and ad hoc coalitions with the Nordic partners and Poland — countries that have demonstrated both political will and military capability. Furthermore, a deepened partnership with the United States must become the central pillar of this strategy, thereby supporting a stronger integration of Romania into the circle of key alliance states.

Within this new framework, Romania will need to invest wisely and consistently in strengthening its own defence capabilities, interoperability, and military mobility, while actively participating in joint armament and technological development initiatives alongside the Nordic countries and Poland. Only through such a comprehensive commitment (diplomatic, military, and economic) can Romania transition from being an active actor in a fragmented East to a genuine pillar of stability within a coherent North-Atlantic axis, capable of making a real contribution to collective security in the face of the region's increasingly complex challenges.

The Role of the US and Inter-Regional Partnerships

The strategic partnership between Romania and the United States has become, in the current geopolitical context marked by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and instability in NATO's eastern neighbourhood, an essential element of national security. However, this partnership requires updating and strengthening, adapted to the new political realities between the US and the EU.

In our view, there is a need for further deepening and expansion of the already solid and consistent strategic relationship with the US, moving towards an advanced operational level with concrete and impactful projects in the fields of defence, technology, and military infrastructure. Romania must maintain and strengthen its proactive role in strategic dialogue with the US by promoting initiatives that include:

an expanded and permanent American military presence on Romanian territory;
a more substantial Romanian participation in defence research and development programmes;
technology transfer and co-production within the defence industry.

Naturally, Romania is well-positioned to become a regional security provider in Southeastern Europe by virtue of:

- its strategic geography on the Black Sea;
- its status as a member of both the EU and NATO;
- its developing military infrastructure.

To achieve this objective, Romania must accelerate its integration into NATO and US military infrastructure networks, including by continuing the modernisation of its air bases (such as Câmpia Turzii and Mihail Kogălniceanu), naval facilities, and logistical capabilities for the rapid transit of Allied forces. In addition, active participation in military infrastructure projects conducted under the auspices of NATO and in partnership with the United States is essential for enhancing Romania's defence capacity and for strengthening the Eastern flank.

In this regard, the Three Seas Initiative provides a useful framework for Romania by:

- developing multimodal corridors (road, rail, maritime, air) to facilitate military mobility;
- strengthening energy interconnectivity (a crucial aspect of strategic resilience);
- attracting investment in dual-use (civilian and military) infrastructure;
- Strategic Partnerships with the Nordic Countries for Armament and Defence Procurement.

Alongside other efforts, Romania must diversify its strategic partnerships in the field of defence, including through deepened cooperation with the Nordic countries. Establishing bilateral and multilateral partnerships with these states is an urgent priority for achieving the armament and equipment objectives of the Romanian Armed Forces, particularly in the context of the need for rapid modernisation and the acquisition of critical capabilities (air and missile defence systems, drones, medium- and long-range missiles, modern artillery systems, combat and river patrol vessels).

These partnerships should include:

- acquisition contracts incorporating a technology transfer component;
- involvement of the Romanian defence industry in Nordic production chains;
- joint research and development initiatives (particularly with Iceland);
- exchange of best practices and joint training programmes.

Defence Budget and Investment Priorities

Romania has taken a crucial step in strengthening its national security by committing to a defence spending threshold of 2.5% of GDP, with a stated intention to increase this towards 5%, according to recent statements by President Nicușor Dan. At a time when threats to the Black Sea region remain high and the pace of equipping and modernising the Romanian Armed Forces must be accelerated, this budget increase is not only timely but essential. It is imperative that resource allocation remains predictable and follows a clear multi-annual plan, ensuring continuity and efficiency in the process of equipping and developing defence capabilities.

Defining strategic investment priorities is urgent to avoid fragmented efforts and waste of resources. In this regard, three key areas must be at the centre of future procurement programmes:

- the naval forces, with an emphasis on modernising the fleet and developing credible capabilities to defend the coastline and Romania's interests in the Black Sea;

- air defence and missile defence, to protect the territory and critical infrastructure against modern aerial threats;
- rapid reaction forces, capable of effectively intervening across the entire national territory and in support of allies, including within NATO operations.

Thus, the Nordic countries represent an ideal strategic partner for the acquisition of cutting-edge combat equipment and weaponry. The defence industries of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, and Denmark are globally recognised for advanced technology, product reliability, and continuous innovation. Systems such as the Gripen multirole aircraft, NASAMS air defence systems, CV90 armoured vehicles, Visby-class corvettes, armoured patrol and amphibious vessels, state-of-the-art anti-ship missiles, and Nordic solutions in electronic warfare and cyber defence provide Romania with essential capabilities to strengthen national and regional defence. Moreover, Iceland's expertise in maritime security, Arctic monitoring, and cyber resilience can bring significant added value to the development of complementary Romanian capabilities. Beyond the obvious technological advantages, a deepened partnership with the Nordic countries would contribute to strengthening Romania's defence industry through cooperative models including technology transfer, industrial offset, co-production, and joint research and development initiatives. The Nordic countries promote a transparent and sustainable model of collaboration, with respect for high standards of quality and ethics. Furthermore, expanding partnerships with the Nordic states and Iceland would help establish a strategic network of trusted allies in the Nordic-Baltic region and on Europe's eastern flank, a crucial element for enhancing Romania's security in the current geopolitical context and supporting its role as a regional security hub.

Conclusions: Romania in a New Strategic Arrangement

Romania is entering a new strategic phase, in an international environment marked by the fragmentation of regional solidarities and the redefinition of power balances. A potential erosion of the cohesion of the B9 and other regional formats compels Bucharest

to adopt a proactive and realistic vision, oriented towards integration into a more flexible and effective transatlantic geometry. Within this new framework, Romania can no longer afford to be a passive beneficiary of NATO guarantees but must become an active and relevant contributor to collective security, capable of generating initiatives and proposing concrete solutions.

To carry out this objective, Romania needs to build up strong bilateral and multilateral partnerships based on pragmatic and sustainable foundations. In this regard, stepping up strategic cooperation with the Nordic countries — a pillar of stability, innovation, and efficiency in the current European security architecture — opens up valuable opportunities. The Nordic model of integrating national defence within a coherent security policy, geared towards new types of threats, can help bring about and support the strategic modernisation of the Romanian military and national security apparatus.

Ultimately, coherence, consistency, and strategic courage must become the essential benchmarks of Romania's foreign and security policy in the coming period. Strengthening the partnership with the United States, diversifying strategic relations with advanced European states in military and technological terms, such as the Nordic countries, and actively participating in new transatlantic initiatives will define the role Romania will play in the future NATO and European security architecture. Acting accordingly is no longer optional but a condition of strategic survival and of establishing Romania as a mature and respected actor on the international stage.

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