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Romania - Ukraine

Narrowing the perceptions gap:
views from Bucharest and Kiev



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Narrowing the perceptions gap

- views from Bucharest
and Kyiv

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Narrowing the perceptions gap - views from Bucharest and Kiev

I. Introduction

The relation between Romania and Ukraine seems to be captive to common misunderstandings, despite the solid common interests shared by the two countries.

The Romanian Center for European Policies, together with the Institute of World Policy (Ukraine) organized Romania-Ukraine Civic Forum in Bucharest (May 2012). It was a first opportunity for Romanian and Ukrainian experts to look beyond negative stereotypes, wrong perceptions and historical background disputes towards proposing concrete projects and areas of cooperation for Bucharest and Kiev.

This paper is part of the attempt made by the two organizations to conduct a permanent dialogue between our civil societies. The authors summarized the most important ideas expressed during the Forum. Also we asked the participants to answer a questionnaire ranking the main concerns, stereotypes and the scores for the possible reset of our common agenda. They have described the perceptions and interpretations that may block the developing of a comprehensive Romania-Ukraine's agenda but also identified the common ground and the direction which will bring both a new dimension of their strategic interests.

II. General view over Ukrainian – Romanian's relations

Romania-Ukraine bilateral relations have gained ground during the last two years but several rather conflictual interpretations of Bucharest's strategic actions (for example, potential new territorial claims) have slowed substantial improvements.

2.1. The current official relation

Bilateral relations showed signs of recovery after Snake Island's dispute, solved at The Hague (2009), with some "unfriendly" startled - especially in the matter of granting Romanian citizenship to the minority in Ukraine.

Clarifications on recurrent potential territorial claims from Bucharest or on the locations of missile shield at Deveselu (Romania) were still needed.

Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry officials have repeatedly ensured, whenever political changes have taken place in Kyiv, that the main objective of Romania, as EU member state and NATO ally is keeping Ukraine on track to achieve European targets as essential for strengthening stability in

the region¹. Ukrainian experts mentioned that Romania is rarely seen as an EU actor in Kyiv but rather as a regional competitor. Ukrainian experts are also concerned that Romania could impose additional conditions regarding, for example, minority rights for its support of Ukraine's euro integration process like it was in the case of Serbia.

2.2. Clarifications still needed: No territorial claim to Ukraine

In 2011, after high-level bilateral visits of Romanian and Ukrainian officials further clarification on disputes and territorial claims were necessary. Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister at the time, Teodor Baconschi, stated during his visit to Kiev in November 2011: "Romania has no territorial claims to Ukraine". "I want to give a clear answer to this question. Romania is a supporter of the principle of inviolability of borders. We have no claim to the territorial integrity of other countries," Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister Teodor Baconschi said, answering a Ukrainian Interfax agency's question².

It was a good year for the bilateral relation and two cooperation agreements were signed, one between the two justice ministries and another concerning the cooperation for European integration thus putting Bucharest's option to support Ukraine on its European road into a formal bilateral document.

Despite the frequent debates in Ukraine on supposed Romanian territorial claims, especially in electoral campaigns, there is no such discourse in the mainstream of the Romanian politics. Moreover, Romania's EU status does not allow any other such claims.

2.3. Romania's strategic partners seen from Kiev

Invoking security concerns, Ukrainian officials raised questions about the NATO missile defense shield in Romania. At the meeting of the Defense and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (October 2011), the Ukraine's representative requested clarification whether Romania has previously consulted its neighbors about the location of missile shield on its territory, the size of U.S. troops in Romania and to what extent their presence will have implications in the Black Sea region. Other concerns such as the efficiency and the cost of the missile defense shield were raised by France (French MEP Jean Michel Boucheron).

Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry reported that as soon as Romania decided to meet U.S. offer to become part of the missile shield project all its neighbors, including Ukraine, were notified.

¹ Foreign Affairs Ministry, Neighbourhood countries <http://www.mae.ro/node/1474>

² „Foreign minister: Romania has no territorial claims against Ukraine”, Interfax news agency, 10th of November 2011

"American soldiers' presence at Deveselu (Romania) will not pose a threat to the balance of the Black Sea region, while in other places in the region, such as Crimea, belonging to Ukraine, a larger number of Russian troops are deployed ". **(Bogdan Aurescu State Secretary, Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**³.

There is little understanding in the Romanian community of experts on why some of Ukraine's politicians are worried about the missile shield, given the defensive nature of the installation. The Russian annoyance towards the shield is also seen as an overreaction that should belong to a past era.

There are also marginal interpretations which could poison the understanding of the efforts for narrowing the perceptions gap between Romanians and Ukrainians. "There are preparations for attaching Northern Bukovina, under the pretext of reunification Southern and Northern Bukovina. This will happen during the next political crisis in Ukraine. It will be very quick and painless." **(Sergey Deev, Civil and Constitutional Ukrainian Congress Secretary, Chairman of the Ukrainian-Romanian relations Committee)**⁴. These sorts of statements were described by the experts at Romania – Ukraine's forum as marginal and irrelevant.

2.4. Justified concerns? Romania's citizenship policy

"Relations between Ukraine and Romania have been improved in recent years, but there are still current disputes, as is the supply of Romanian passports to Ukrainian citizens, which was labeled as <<an unfriendly act>> (*Oleg Voloshyn, head of the Information Department , Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*)⁵.

Romania's policy for granting passports to Romanian citizens raised concerns in other EU countries because of the fears that sudden waves of new EU citizens would run in the Western EU countries. On the other hand, granting citizenship for Moldova was seen in 2009 as a "frightening scenario" for the region's stability because the EU country would effectively annex one quarter of its neighbour's population⁶.

Despite these concerns, granting citizenship outside the country is not an assimilations procedure, Romania's post communist policy in the citizenship's area tried to overcome the judicial effects of the territorial changes after the World War II.

³ „Scutul antirachetă, criticat de Franța, Rusia și Ucraina la Adunarea Parlamentară NATO de la București”, Mediafax „Criticism from France, Russia and Ukraine on Missile defence shield in Romania” (NATO's meeting in Bucharest), Mediafax, 8th of October 2011

⁴“Ukraine fears that Romania will attach Northern Bukovina”, Adevarul, 8th of September, takeover from Ukrainian portal MIGnews.com.ua

⁵ „Delivery of Romanian passports Ukrainian citizens is "unfriendly act," says Kiev, 7th of June, Mediafax news agency

⁶ „EU dismayed by Romania mass citizenship plan”, EUObserver, 17th of April 2009

Each applicant has to prove the previous existence of the Romanian citizenship in his / her family, through a bureaucratic procedure. It is important to mention that Romanian policy makes a clear difference between ethnic identity and citizenship (Russian and Ukrainians having ancestors with citizenship of the pre-War Romanian kingdom are also entitled)⁷.

Granting passports is not an attempt to undermine the states where the citizens live. On the contrary, the largest number of applicants comes from Republic of Moldova and Romania is the biggest advocate of this country's accession into the EU and it has a strong partnership with Chisinau.

Citizenship policies are not undermining Moldovan statehood, where much of the population is eligible for Romanian citizenship. The more so, Bucharest citizenship policy should not be a problem for Ukraine, a larger state, where only a small minority is eligible.

"I explained to our Romanian colleagues repeatedly that the distribution of Romanian passports in border regions is an unfriendly act"

Oleg Voloshin,
Ukrainian official of
Foreign Affairs Ministry

2.5. Politics and EU critics: Anticorruption and convicted prime ministers

Ukraine's European agenda and Brussels` critics to Kiev on independence of judiciary and fundamental rights have been also covered by Romanian media. Statements by high ranking Ukrainian Parliament's officials who said Brussels had double standards judging Ukraine and Romania – referring to the former prime ministers' trials - Yulia Tymoshenko and Adrian Nastase - were largely covered by public news agencies⁸.

⁷ For an comparative view on the Romanian policy see "All Quiet on the Eastern Border. The Romanian Policy of Regaining Citizenship compared to other EU case studies", CRPE Policy Memo no. 22, July 2011

⁸ Europe demonstrates double standards while lecturing on Tymoshenko case, says Party of Regions, Interfax news agency Ukraine

However, comparing Tymoshenko and Năstase cases was little more than a rhetoric exercise of victimization – used in Romania by the defenders of Adrian Năstase and in Ukraine by the enemies of Yulia Tymoshenko.

In fact, the situations could not be more different.

The European Union supports efficient anticorruption institutions in the new Member States and in the accession countries. Romania and Bulgaria are covered by a special post-accession monitoring mechanism for justice. Consistent reforms were implemented in the Romanian judiciary over the years with support from the European Commission and the evolution is currently monitored by the peer-review missions, thus EU has detailed information about the Romanian justice system. Strong institutions and rules were developed by Romania thanks to this EU assistance.

Năstase`s trial is only the tip of the iceberg. It is indeed the most visible and famous case, but the performance of the Romanian anticorruption institutions, supported by EU, is reputable. **Over 1,200 officials were convicted in 2011 for corruption by the independent judges in the cases prepared by the special Anticorruption Directorate.** The figure includes five ministers or former ministers, three MPs, four magistrates and 14 county-level officials. Having Adrian Năstase sentenced to jail is no big surprise in Romania considering this context. His case lasted 7 years in courts and the former head of the Romanian government enjoyed all procedural steps to defend himself, including a favorable decision of the Constitutional Court⁹. He finally received a light sentence compared with the other people involved in the illegal financial scheme which financed his electoral campaign. These were the reasons for which EU did not criticize Romania for this case (on the contrary) and the circumstances are quite different for the former head of the Kiev government now in jail.

III. The Perceptions of the Romanian-Ukrainian relation

3.1. The dynamic of the perceptions seen by experts

After the Civic Forum Romania – Ukraine we asked the participant experts to complete an online questionnaire on the main issues covered during the discussions. The following section reports the findings of this survey.

Experts – participants to Romania Ukraine Forum - are optimistic about the future of the bilateral relations. But they have admitted to a series of „tactical problems”, partially wrong perceptions and

⁹ „Eu votez DNA – De ce merită să apărăm instituțiile anticorupție”, Cristian Ghinea, Humanitas Publishing House, October 2012, Bucharest

erroneous information which have brought in the public's eye exaggerated fears between the two countries. All these may hardly allow the settlement of a consistent Romania-Ukraine agenda on their strategic interests. All neighbors had to deal, at some points in time, with such perceptions, Ukrainian analysts argued. Historical arguments of territorial belongings have always existed between the neighbors, Oleksandr Palii said, during the Forum's debates.

3.2. „Small” blocking-problems for a new agenda

Navigation on the Danube Bystroe channel, the interpretations of the Snakes Island international verdict, the rights of the Ukrainian minority in Romania and the rights of the Romanian minority in Ukraine are some of the small problems blocking the bilateral agenda, as Nicu Popescu, expert from the European Council and Foreign Relations, indicated.

On the one hand Ukraine overreacted on the citizenship issue, but on the other hand Kyiv's reaction „can be somewhat understood and does not differ too much from the reaction of other countries in Central and Eastern Europe who face similar problems”, Popescu argued.

3.3. Common stereotypes

In Ukraine, Romania is seen as a state as corrupt and as little-functional as Ukraine, and which has joined NATO and EU out of a coincidence of geopolitical factors, Popescu indicated. On the other part of the border, the former Soviet Union socialist republic is largely seen as a „small Russia” failing in the reform process; both countries are perceived as security threats towards each other.

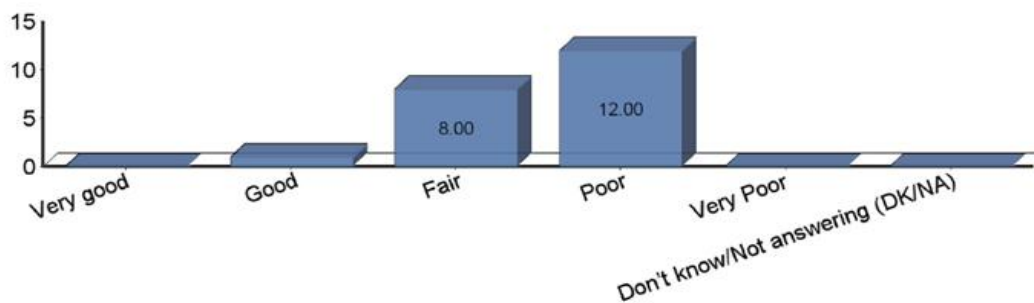
„Romania is a member of NATO, Ukraine only works with NATO. We understand that Romania wants to consolidate its eastern borders. Romania jeopardizes Ukraine's safety because the missile shield is on its territory, increasing its military potential, being backed by the U.S. This position seems a little strange, as many experts say that Romania is the most consistent supporter of Ukraine. A military imbalance exists, military spending are higher in Romania, some military experts in Ukraine are concerned that thanks to the missile shield Romania will have a chance to increase its military capabilities more in comparison with Ukraine”, Oksana Pyliavets, Ukrainian analyst explained during the Forum's debates adding that the lack of confidence between the two states is caused by a lack of mutual information.

(About stereotypes)
Romania's membership is not really deserved and Ukraine certainly deserves to join the EU about the same proportion as Romania. Stereotypes from Romania concerning Ukraine are not so flattering either.

Nicu Popescu
ECFR expert

Described as „poor” by over 57% of the respondents to the experts survey (12 out of 20) and „good” only by 4.7% the current state of Ukrainian – Romanian relations are seen as meager because of the lack of any real commitment between the two government.

In your opinion, which option best describes the actual state of Ukrainian-Romanian relations?



According to the experts remarks linked to the survey's answers, both countries tend to interpret each other on the basis of clichés and are not keen on investing in confidence building or long-range projects.

In experts' opinion, Bucharest tends to see (wrongfully) Ukraine as a little Russia (for which it does not have the best feelings) prone to capitalize on any Romanian weakness, while Kyiv sees Romania as a weak state incapable of offering anything for bettering Ukraine's lot on the international scene.

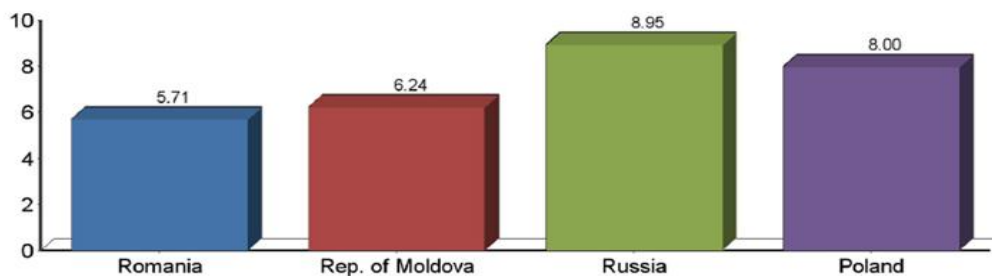
The above mentioned stereotypes have not significantly changed during the years and are based on historical backgrounds. They also were labeled by experts as the most serious obstacle for launching a real cooperation between Bucharest and Kyiv.

3.4. Expectations from the Eastern Partnership

Regarding the areas of future cooperation, the survey identified the twin problems of minorities as the most sensitive issues: **Romanian minority rights in Ukraine (rate 7.24 out of 10) and the problems of Ukrainian minority in Romania (6.43 out of 10)**. It is clear that minority issues will hamper the bilateral relation on the years to come.

Cautiousness and dialogue are necessary in order to address them or at least to make clear were the two countries agree to disagree.

**How would you appreciate Ukraine's relations with the following states?
(Where "0" is for Not at all important and "10" is for Very important)**



The expectations towards **Romania's involvement in promoting Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries' EU accession are very high (86%), while only 14% indicate its involvement as sufficient**. The Romanian's involvement in Eastern Partnership's future is seen as being too much concentrated on Rep. Moldova's progresses and reforms (8.95 out of 10 indicate Moldova

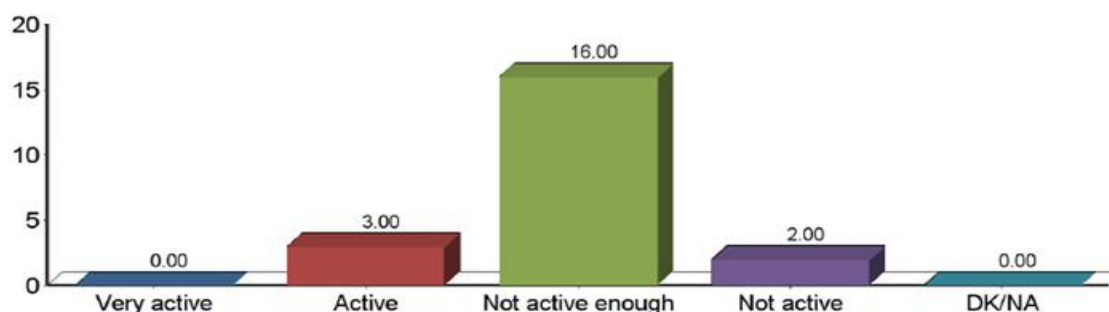
on the top's Romania's priority while the same involvement towards Ukraine was rated with 3.33 out of 10 responses).

Experts have also rated the most important areas in the Romanian – Ukrainian cooperation with Politics and Energy seen as the most important (7,81 out of 10) followed by Economy (7,71 out of 10) and Security issue (7,24 out of 10).

As for the controversial issues on Romanian – Ukrainian mutual agenda, experts rated the minorities` rights on top:

| | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. The alleged territorial disputes | 5.43 out of 10 |
| 2. Offering Romanian citizenship to Romanian minority in Ukraine | 6.05 out of 10 |
| 3. The issue of Romanian minority rights in Ukraine | 7.24 out of 10 |
| 4. The accusations of “Romanization” of the Ukrainian minority and respectively the “Ukrainization” of the Romanian minorities | 6.43 out of 10 |
| 5. The issue of Maican and Snakes islands | 5.05 out of 10 |
| 6. Another answer (optional) | 0.25 out of 10 |

How would you appreciate Romania's implication in fostering Eastern Partnership states way forward towards European accession?



In fact, what experts on both sides indicated is that an Europeanization of the Ukrainian-Romanian agenda is needed.

„Nevertheless, by now both Romania and Ukraine have been seeking partners for regional cooperation without looking towards one another. This is explained by mutual mistrust and even some kind of arrogance towards each other. In case of Ukraine it is an arrogance of geopolitical

weight, whereas Romania relies in its structural advantages: membership in the EU and NATO. When it comes to Ukraine's government, it should get rid of the mentality saying that everything will come for granted due to its geopolitical potential", Kateryna Shynkaruk, Ukrainian analyst indicated during the Forum's discussions.

Both, she added, need to leave aside negative politicized stereotypes spread by the media, and fill the existing information vacuum with more relevant perceptions of each other.

IV. Recommendations

Deepening relations between the two countries, overcoming or correcting negative perceptions, building or developing other dimensions of existing partnerships are some of the directions diplomats, experts and authorities in the two countries will have to build.

1. Europeanization of the Romania – Ukraine agenda is seen as a key concept for a consistent and fair cooperation in the future. Romania could come up with examples of best practices from EU and neighboring countries to correct some of the perceptions mentioned above. Debates could include elites of the two countries especially because among them were identified neutral perceptions regarding their bilateral relations.

2. Building around the gaps: The minorities issue is the poisoning one in the bilateral agenda. Both Bucharest and Kyiv show interest in it but the official dialogue is deficient. We recommend therefore a neutral, external actor, to address this issue. This mediator could be EU which also has a stake in solving minority problems.

3. Eastern Partnership – More efforts are necessary from Romanian diplomacy to position itself as an advocate within EU for other countries in the region (besides R. of Moldova). Ukraine is also very much interested in the solution of the frozen Transnistrian conflict on its border and this could be one of the key elements on the common agenda.

4. Regional cooperation – Romania should include Ukraine in its strategic partnership with Poland for deepening and consolidating a trilateral relation.

5. OSCE Chairmanship 2013 - Ukraine will come back in the international spotlight when taking over the OSCE Chairmanship in 2013 and Bucharest should encourage Kyiv into paying attention to Transnistrian conflict.

List of experts who participated at the Romania –Ukraine Forum, Bucharest 2012

| Nr. | Surname/Name | Institution |
|------------|---------------------|--|
| 1 | Armand Gosu | University of Bucharest, Romania |
| 2 | Nicu Popescu | European Council on Foreign Relations, London |
| 3 | Leonid Litra | IDIS "Viitorul", Republic of Moldova |
| 4 | Nicolae Ecobescu | EURISC Foundation, Romania |
| 5 | Sergiu Celac | Center for Sustainable Development, Romania |
| 6 | Paraschiva Badescu | European Foundation "Nicolae Titulescu", Romania |
| 7 | Agnes Nicolescu | European Institute of Romania |
| 8 | Sorin Ionita | Expert Forum, Romania |
| 9 | George Tiugea | "Ovidiu Sincai" Institute, Romania |
| 10 | Andrey Devyatkov | New Europe College, Romania |
| 11 | Eugenia Gusilov | Romania Energy Center |
| 12 | Valentina Dimulescu | Romania Energy Center |
| 13 | Valentin Burada | Foundation for Civil Society Development, Romania |
| 14 | Adriana Zaharia | FOND, Romania |
| 15 | Adela Rusu | FOND, Romania |
| 16 | Ioana Avadani | Center for Independent Journalism, Romania |
| 17 | Octavian Milewski | Romania |
| 18 | Nicolae Toderaş | National School for Political Studies (SNSPA) |
| 19 | Liliana Popescu | National School for Political Studies (SNSPA), Romania |
| 20 | Violeta Alexandru | Institute for Public Policy, Romania |
| 21 | Victoria Nedelciuc | Soros Foundation, Romania |
| 22 | Sergiu Panainte | Soros Foundation, Romania |
| 23 | Andrei Avram | Christian Democratic Foundation, Romania |
| 24 | Stanislav Secrieru | Romanian Center for European Policies (CRPE) |
| 25 | Ileana Racheru | University of Bucharest |

| | | |
|----|---------------------|--|
| 26 | Angela Gramada | Center for East-European and Asian Studies |
| 27 | Alina Inayeh | Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, German Marshall Fund |
| 28 | Ionut Purica | Center for Energy and Environment Consultancy |
| 29 | Oana Preda | Resource Center for Public Participation |
| 30 | Adrian Sorescu | Center for Sustainable Policies Ecopolis |
| 31 | Viktor Shlinchak | Institute of World Policy, Ukraine |
| 32 | Alyona Getmanchuk | Institute of World Policy, Ukraine |
| 33 | Natalia Sagalata | Institute of World Policy, Ukraine |
| 34 | Oksana Pyliavets | Institute of World Policy, Ukraine |
| 35 | Vitalii Chervonenko | All-Ukrainian Journalists Union, Ukraine |
| 36 | Iurii Korolchuk | Energy Studies Institute, Ukraine |
| 37 | Oleksii Semenii | International Foundation "United World", Ukraine |
| 38 | Oleksandr Palii | Institute of World Policy, Ukraine |
| 39 | Mar'yana Kuzo | Civic Initiative "Europe without Barriers", Ukraine |
| 40 | Olexander Scherba | Ukraine |
| 41 | Anatolii Lutsenko | GMT Group, Ukraine |
| 42 | Nataliia Belitser | P. Orlik Institute for Democracy, Ukraine |
| 43 | Vitalii Bala | Situations Modeling Agency, Ukraine |
| 44 | Kateryna Shynkaruk | Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting, Ukraine |
| 45 | Pavlo Zhovnirenko | Center for Strategic Studies, Ukraine |
| 46 | Volodymir Fesenko | Center for Applied Political Studies "Penta", Ukraine |
| 47 | Olexiy Haran | School for Policy Analysis, University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, Ukraine |
| 48 | Cristian Ghinea | Romanian Center for European Policies |
| 49 | Dragos Dinu | Romanian Center for European Policies |
| 50 | Tudor Cojocariu | Romanian Center for European Policies |

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