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GEOPOLITICAL POSITIONING OF ROMANIA
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

INTRODUCTION

Ukraine and Romania's geopolitical importance in the modern world has become extremely relevant due to social and political events. The key event was Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which overturned the geopolitical dynamics of the region. The realities of Ukraine and its borders have become a sensitive place to various challenges and influences. This requires the country to carefully consider geopolitical risks and implement strategies to ensure national security and sovereignty. The Eastern European front in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict defines new challenges for the international community. Currently, international efforts are aimed at supporting Ukraine in the war and restoring stability in the region.

Ukraine has become a resistance's symbol and a determining factor in the geopolitical context. Its sovereignty and security have become the object of attention for world leaders, emphasizing the importance of Ukraine in the strategic plans of the international community. Romania has become a strategic reference point in the context of maintaining stability and legal order. The geopolitical weight of Ukraine and Romania has gained a new level of significance due to the events in Ukraine, which determine their role in the structures of world politics and reveal their strategic importance for ensuring international stability and security.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to scientists Valerii A. Smolii and Oleksii V. Yas, this war caused serious geopolitical risks and threats to the sovereignty of Ukraine, and its impact is felt on stability and security not only in the Eastern European region, but also on a global scale.

Researcher Ruslan Demchyshak notes that the Russian war against Ukraine, which began in 2014, actualized the issue of collective defense of countries and coincided with the strengthening of nationalism and isolationism tendencies in the foreign policy of the European countries. Due to the current situation, the global community is faced with the important task of ensuring effective international responses to the geopolitical challenges arising from the conflict on the Eastern European front. In particular, modern geopolitics determines the need to build security strategies and international cooperation to ensure stability and peace in this region.

Next to this, it is worth paying attention to the Ukraine's geopolitical value and Romania as key corridors for the transit of energy resources, which is determined by their role in shaping the energy landscape of the region and has far-reaching consequences for the politics, economy, and security not only of these countries, but also of Europe as a whole. In addition, the membership of these countries in international organizations creates a foundation for interaction on the world stage, allowing them to actively contribute to solving global challenges and forming strategies in international relations.

Due to their geographical position, Ukraine and Romania are becoming key players in ensuring energy security for Europe. Control over gas transit routes gives Ukraine and Romania political influence in the region, providing the opportunity to participate in the formation of energy strategies and policies. V. Tetuliak notes that in the context of gas transit, it is important to take into account not only economic aspects, but also political and security dimensions of this topic, since ensuring the stability and safety of transit routes becomes a vital task for Ukraine and Romania as key players in this energy process. Romania, which is already an EU member, and Ukraine, which is developing strategies for integration into European structures, contribute to the creation of a single European energy system and market.

The political influence provided by transit control enables these countries to actively influence the formation of energy strategies and policies in the region. It also becomes a considerable factor in their participation in determining Europe's future energy landscape and promotes their integration into European energy structures.

An important component of geopolitical and economic strategic planning for Romania is its access to the sea. This expands the country's prospects for trade,

contributes to energy security, and defines its role in international life. The geopolitical, economic, and political position of Romania allows it to participate in the processes of European integration and the formation of regional development policy.

The geopolitical positioning of Romania in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war is determined not only by historical and cultural relationships, but also by its strategic position and geographical location in the region. Among the important factors are the neighbourhood with Ukraine, Romania's membership in the European Union, and NATO.

Within the framework of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Romania is an active participant in geopolitical changes in the Eastern European region. Its geographical position in the western Black Sea, bordering the southern part of Ukraine, gives Romania key importance in terms of security and stability.

In particular, Romania plays an important role in ensuring the security of NATO's eastern front line, undertaking active defense and deterrence, as well as hosting additional Allied forces. Since 2015, Romania has housed the headquarters of the multinational NATO division in South-Eastern Europe, and since 2016 the Aegis coastal missile defense system, designed to protect against ballistic missile attacks originating from outside the Euro-Atlantic region. In May 2022, NATO established an EFP battlegroup in Romania, which was a direct result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and active advocacy by Bucharest to strengthen NATO's presence in the region. Romania actively advocates strengthening security in Central and Eastern Europe at regular summits of the Bucharest 9, which was founded in 2015 at the initiative of Warsaw and Bucharest with the aim of strengthening regional security. Members of the Bucharest 9 have held several high-level meetings since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In particular, at the summit in February 2023, the leaders of the Bucharest 9, together with US President Joe Biden and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, signed a declaration condemning Moscow and calling for the strengthening of the Alliance's presence in the Central-Eastern Europe region. Another main topic for the Bucharest 9 was the preservation and further strengthening of support for Ukraine. On June 2023 during the summit, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said that Romania «will continue to support Ukraine as long as necessary. Ukraine's victory in this war is our main goal. At the same time, Romania's backing for Ukraine's accession to the Alliance is unwavering». Experts hope for the potential of the Bucharest 9 to ensure stability in the region. Marchin Kazmirski, an employee of the Polish Bureau of National Security, noted in an interview with the author of these lines that «the Bucharest 9 as a format played a very significant role in

bringing together views that are somewhat different from each other. This provided us, as a group, with the chance to speak with one voice».

Romanian officials called for increased security cooperation at other multinational forums and meetings. For example, although the goals of «The Three Seas Initiative» format primarily relate to strengthening intra-regional economic cooperation, the group's 12 members jointly expressed concern about Russian aggression and advocated closer ties among themselves. It is significant that at a meeting in The Hague in June 2023 with seven other NATO members and the Secretary General of the Alliance, the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, stated that Russia continues to pose the greatest direct threat to Euro-Atlantic security and advocated strengthening the North Atlantic Alliance at the summit in Vilnius in July 2023. At the summit itself, Romania joined the G7 declaration of support for Ukraine. In addition, in April 2023, Romania signed a cooperation agreement with Ukraine and Moldova aimed at strengthening the Black Sea region and intends to host the next summit of «The Three Seas Initiative».

Faced with the situation in Ukraine, Romania joined a group of countries that accused Russia of flagrant violations of international law, the UN Charter, and the principles on which the rules-based international order is based and supported the idea that the war was not only against Ukraine but also against democratic values and the foundations of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

Romania has repeatedly emphasized its commitment to promoting compliance with international law. Romania has submitted a Declaration of Accession to the case initiated by Ukraine against the Russian Federation at the International Court of Justice of the United Nations regarding the dispute related to allegations of genocide. Moreover, Romania submitted to the Secretariat of the European Court of Human Rights an application to join the case in Ukraine's favour. The case concerns serious violations of human rights committed in the context of military aggression on the territory of Ukraine.

Also, Romania voted in the UN to adopt a resolution that condemns Russia's illegal annexation of some Ukrainian territories. The resolution calls on UN member states not to recognize any changes in the status of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson regions and asks the Russian Federation to cancel the decision on the illegal annexation of some Ukrainian territories, as well as to immediately, completely, and unconditionally withdraw military forces from the territory of Ukraine. This shows that Romania is among the countries that support Ukraine's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters.

Simultaneously, Romania plays an active role in promoting NATO's partnership policy, supporting partners from the Eastern Neighbourhood, as well as strengthening the Alliance's ties with the Southern Neighbourhood. In this regard, Romania provided support to other neighbouring countries in the form of voluntary contributions along NATO lines to strengthen the stability and potential of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Jordan. According to the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this decision corresponds to the foreign policy and security priorities of Romania, as it contributes to the achievement of the goals of strengthening security and stability near the eastern flank, especially in the Black Sea region.

Giving the dynamics of events in Eastern Europe, Romania is active in identifying and supporting measures aimed at resolving the conflict and ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Its participation in European structures and a number of international initiatives emphasizes its role as a key participant in global efforts to counter aggression and restore international order.

As Yula V. Okunovska notes, literally from the first days of the full-scale war, Romania sent ammunition and military equipment to Ukraine and likewise expressed a clear and unwavering readiness to accept our wounded in military hospitals, which continued to happen.

At the same time, despite Bucharest's unwavering political support for Kyiv, including strong and consistent criticism of Kremlin actions and calls for increased sanctions against Russia, Romania's policy towards the ongoing conflict can be described as extremely cautious. Clear political declarations contrast with the limited scope of official military support offered to Ukraine since February 24, 2022; the Kiel Institute for the World Economy estimates it to be around 3 million euros. Initially, Bucharest sent only a small batch of fuel, bulletproof vests, helmets, and ammunition, which contrasts with the level of aid provided to Kyiv by other countries in the region (except Hungary). It was only in mid-June 2022 that the Romanian government passed a legislative amendment allowing the provision of weapons from Romania's military stocks to allied and partner countries. As a result of this amendment, Romania likely transferred 28 T-72 tanks to Ukraine, five of which were fully operational. In August 2022, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov mentioned five aid packages provided by Bucharest (including rifles, ammunition, and spare parts). However, none of the aforementioned information was officially confirmed by the Romanian government. Other manifestations of the Romanian leadership's cautious approach included their decision not to sign the letter of February 28, 2022, from eight NATO eastern flank countries calling on the EU to grant Ukraine candidate status as soon as possible (Bucharest likely wanted Moldova to receive this status as

well) and the relatively late visit of President Iohannis to Kyiv (compared to the timing of visits by other regional heads of state), which took place on June 16, 2022.

Bucharest has consistently suggested that the actual military aid it has provided to Ukraine is significantly higher, but it cannot disclose this for security reasons. It seems that the Romanian government would like to avoid a situation where Moscow could interpret their steps as manifestations of Romania's direct involvement in the current conflict. Although Bucharest refuses to comment on possible supplies of Romanian weapons to Kyiv, it confirms that the territory of Romania is used for supplies from other NATO countries. Bucharest is likely to cite security concerns both out of genuine concern about a possible Russian reaction and out of its desire to conceal the extent of Romanian military aid provided to Kyiv.

It can be assumed that Romania's restraint in the supply of weapons to Ukraine is due mainly to its reluctance to help Kiev at the expense of its own military potential. Romania has relatively small stocks of weapons and equipment that it could sacrifice to other countries without undermining its own defense capabilities. In addition, Romania fears that such deliveries may be perceived by Moscow as provocation and may pose a threat to the security of Moldova as Russian troops (about 1,600 men) are deployed on the territory of Moldova, in the separatist region of Transnistria. Another reason for this position in Romania may be its traditionally cautious attitude towards Ukraine.

Bucharest has concentrated its activities on humanitarian aid – since the beginning of March 2022, the EU logistics hub has been operating near Suceava, which distributes and coordinates support for Ukraine. Regular shipments of aid from Romania to Ukraine are being organized for those who need it most. 80 thousand Ukrainians found shelter in Romania. They were offered free public transport, medical services, access to education, simplified procedures for legal employment, and other forms of assistance. In addition, Bucharest has offered material and humanitarian assistance to Moldova, which is struggling with a large influx of migrants (the number of immigrants accepted by Moldova is the same as in Romania, despite the huge difference in the population of the two countries). It also organized so-called green corridors to facilitate the rapid transit of refugees from the Moldovan-Ukrainian border further to Moldova.

Romania is involved in helping export grain grown in Ukraine. According to the European Commission, Romania (mainly the Danube) accounts for about 50% of all Ukrainian products exported through the EU. In addition, the Romanian government made infrastructural investments worth tens of millions of euros in order to be able to send even larger volumes of Ukrainian goods.

It should be noted that faced with the Russian blockade of the Black Sea ports of Ukraine, Romania, together with Ukraine and Moldova, the EU and the USA created a forum to coordinate the export of Ukrainian grain. It became the main channel for it, with about 30 million tons, or about 60% of the total, exported through the ports on the Danube and Constanta since the beginning of the war. To facilitate traffic on the Danube, Romania liberalized access for third-country vessels to navigate the Kilia, a border arm of the river, suspended state protests that had been ongoing since 2014 against Ukraine's use of the Bystroye Canal for shipping, and began a peaceful settlement of the dispute from this source over its deepening. In connection with the attacks on the Ukrainian ports of Reni and Izmail on the Ukrainian shore of Kili, Romania strengthened its air defenses over the lower Danube. Fragments of Russian drones fell on its territory, but they have not yet caused any damage.

At the same time, attention should be paid to the fact that Romania has minimized the possibility of importing grain into its own territory, while avoiding the incitement of a dispute with Ukraine. Together with Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, this country prompted the EU in the spring of 2023 to introduce a ban on imports of Ukrainian cereals into the EU. Although the authorities in Bucharest expressed their dissatisfaction with its lifting in September, they chose, unlike Hungary and Poland, not to support the unilateral embargo. Instead, they agreed with Ukraine to suspend imports for 30 days until the "question is cleared", after which they will provide the possibility of imports under license directly for farmers and processors, but not for dealers, if they can demonstrate a shortage of cereals on the market.

Despite all the nuances, in the few official statements of Ukrainian officials, the dominant tone is gratitude for Romania's help, especially humanitarian (refugee reception) and logistical (export of Ukrainian goods through the Danube ports to Constanta). Kyiv also expressed gratitude to Bucharest for supporting President Zelenskyi's application for Ukraine's membership in NATO, submitted at the end of September 2022. In addition, Kyiv has never criticized the amount of military aid provided by Romania (because it is probably aware of its limited capacity in this field). The positive responses of the Ukrainian government regarding support from Romania should be interpreted as statements motivated by the desire to maintain good neighbourly relations, which are necessary for the development of economic and transport cooperation.

Finally, the government in Bucharest fears that the potential success of the Russian offensive in Ukraine could lead to profound changes in Romania's strategic situation. In a pessimistic scenario, this would mean the appearance of Russian troops on the border with Romania and, just as importantly, would endanger the sovereignty of Moldova. Therefore, in the context of the ongoing war, Romania continues

to view NATO as its main guarantor of security and seeks to strengthen NATO's military presence on its territory and in the Black Sea. Russia's invasion of Ukraine also prompted the government in Bucharest to decide to increase Romania's defense spending from 2% to 2.5% of GDP starting in 2023. The additional funds are expected to accelerate the ongoing modernization of the Romanian military.

In addition to the fact that the proximity of the border with Ukraine causes security concerns, experts believe that the consequences for the economy will also be important for Romania. Although the direct impact is small, given the weak ties to the Russian economy, the indirect impact, seen in increased global risk aversion, could be significant as investors are reluctant to invest in Romania, which is close to the country in conflict. Therefore, investment decisions will become more balanced. However, Romania is closely linked to the European market; therefore, fluctuations will mainly come from this source.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the geopolitical positioning of Romania in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war is determined by the country's active role in supporting a peaceful resolution of the conflict and its strategic attitude toward maintaining stability in the eastern part of Europe. As part of NATO, the country relies on the support of other allied countries, as both the security of Romania and the Black Sea are integral parts of Euro-Atlantic security. Together with other partners, Romania is working on strengthening deterrence and defense positions on the eastern flank. Romania's foreign policy actions were aimed at supporting Ukraine, starting with urgent measures to provide food and shelter to refugees and ending with the promotion of Ukrainian exports. In connection with the situation in Ukraine, Romania aimed to achieve sanctions against the Russian Federation and its isolation at the international level, as well as to support political and diplomatic measures and assistance provided by the EU and NATO. Romania acted as a promoter of neighbouring countries that intend to join NATO or the EU and focused more on regional forms of cooperation. External action in the future is aimed at remaining aligned with the three main partners: the EU, NATO, and the US.

Other forms of multi-dimensional support to Ukraine were aimed at facilitating the transportation and transit of Ukrainian products to international markets, although this meant comprehensive measures to expand the transit and logistical capacities of the ports of Constanta and Galati. Another cooperation initiative brought together the foreign ministers of Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and was devoted to the theme of energy security.

Romania's representatives also showed a clear intention to support NATO's actions, stressing in several meetings the importance of cooperation with other international partners who share the same values, and advocating for the strengthening of cooperation between the EU and NATO and for a strong transatlantic partnership as a cornerstone of European security. After the NATO summit, Romania was able to confirm the importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic security and take advantage of the increased presence of the Alliance on the eastern flank. Romania intends to increase its contribution to NATO in many dimensions, acting as a factor of security and stability. In general, Romania positions itself as a power that carries out foreign policy actions coordinated with the actions of its three main partners: the EU, NATO, and the USA.

Romania's geopolitical position in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war is defined by the country's active participation in peacekeeping efforts and the strategic desire to preserve stability in the eastern part of Europe. As a NATO member, Romania is counting on the support of other allies, as the security of the country and the Black Sea is an integral part of the safety of the Euro-Atlantic region. Together with other partners, it is actively working on strengthening defensive positions on the eastern front.

Romania remains unchanged in the support given to Ukraine, but in such a way as to prevent its involvement in the conflict. Romania has chosen to support decisions relating to respect for international law, promoting diplomatic measures and providing multilateral support, especially with regard to the integration of refugees and facilitating Ukrainian cereals and goods, supporting EU decisions, and supporting countries that intend to further join NATO or the EU. With regard to economic cooperation, Romania facilitates the transportation and transit of Ukrainian products to international markets, expanding the transit and logistical capabilities of the ports of Constanta and Galati.

In the future, Romanian representatives show a clear intention to support NATO and cooperate with other international partners to strengthen the transatlantic partnership and Euro-Atlantic security. In general, Romania acts as an active player in foreign policy, cooperating with three key partners: the EU, NATO and the USA.

KEYWORDS:

Ukraine, Romania, modern geopolitics, diplomacy, Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukrainian-Romanian relations

Изложение

Геополітичне позиціонування Румунії в контексті російсько-української війни

Стаття присвячена вивченню геополітичного позиціонуванню Румунії в умовах російсько-української війни. Авторки аналізують глобальний вимір взаємодії між Україною та Румунією на сучасному етапі, роль та досвід Румунії у підтримці європейської та євроатлантичної інтеграції України. Розглядається місце обох країн у глобальній геополітиці та їхнє геополітичне позиціонування в контексті російсько-української війни. Результати дослідження демонструють важливість розробки стратегій дипломатичної діяльності обох країн на сучасному етапі, а також настановляють на подальші дослідження у галузі міжнародних відносин та дипломатії.

Ключові слова:

Україна, Румунія, сучасна геополітика, дипломатія, російсько-українська війна, українсько-румунські відносини

STRESZCZENIE

GEOPOLITYCZNE POZYCJONOWANIE SIĘ RUMUNII W KONTEKŚCIE WOJNY ROSYJSKO-UKRAIŃSKIEJ

W artykule naświetlono sprawę geopolitycznego pozycjonowania się Rumunii w warunkach wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej. Autorki analizują globalny wymiar współpracy Ukrainy z Rumunią na obecnym etapie, rolę i doświadczenia Rumunii w poparciu europejskiej i euroatlantyckiej integracji Ukrainy. Analizują miejsce obu krajów w globalnej polityce i ich geopolityczne pozycjonowanie się w kontekście wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej. Wyniki badania wskazują na docelowość opracowania strategii działalności dyplomatycznej obu krajów, jak również stymulują dalsze badania w dziedzinie stosunków międzynarodowych oraz dyplomacji.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

Ukraina, Rumunia, współczesna geopolityka, dyplomacja, wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska, stosunki ukraińsko-rumuńskie

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