

History

Romania from Great War to Frozen Security Paradigm. A Geopolitical Approach to the Main Characteristics of Romania's National Security Throughout The 20th Century

Marius-Sorin Miclea, Ph.D,

¹General Consul, Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

²Associate Professor, University “Babeș-Bolyai”, Mihail Kogălniceanu Street, no.1,
postal code 400347, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

³American Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Citrus Heights, CA 95621, USA,
e-mail address: miclea_m@yahoo.com

Abstract. This article, which focuses on a well-defined period in the recent history of Romania, is a revised fragment that is part of my doctoral thesis in international relations, presented in France. Romania is, without a doubt, one of the main geostrategic actors of the region. Through its geographical location west of the Black Sea, through its demographic, military and economic potential, Romania is able to position itself in the group of Black Sea riparian powers, such as Bulgaria, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Turkey. From a cultural point of view, Romania is the only Latin state in the area, but the beneficiary of a double identity, both Western and Eastern. As we have already mentioned, the country is located at a crossroads of the region, being, throughout history, the first European bastion with the mission of blocking the advance of migratory peoples towards the West. Thus, Romania's security values are not at all recent, having their roots in antiquity. The bivalent ancestry, Western and Eastern, represents an additional asset for Romania but also for the West. Trained in Western schools, Romania's top leaders have contributed to the transformation and development of modern Romania, knowing how to combine the Western spirit with the traditions of Eastern civilization, in a way that allows social progress in this part of the world. National security has always been a concern for the political class of modern Romania. Unfortunately, until the end of the Cold War, national debates in this area were permeated by a damaging policy inherent to totalitarian regimes. Romania had to reshape its national strategy throughout history according to the different regional hegemonies that operated in this part of the world. These transformations were

determined by the major changes in the global security environment that affected the regional security framework. Analyzing Romania's position on the international stage, we come to the conclusion that its role must be approached through the prism of its sensitive position in the region. As a dual member state of NATO and the EU, it fulfills a defensive mission for Europe. To the same extent, it plays a defensive role for the Black Sea region through its defense and international policies, thus becoming a regional exporter of security and stability. Romania's integration into European organizations transformed the Eastern Black Sea littoral into an area controlled by Western allies. Thus, the entire European integration process ensures NATO's rapid and efficient access to the Middle East, and the entire region has passed, after the collapse of the Eastern European regimes, into the Western sphere of influence.

Keywords: Greater Black Sea Region, Warsaw Treaty, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, National Security, Great Romania, Romanian Army, communism, Soviet invasion.

National security has always preoccupied the political class of modern Romania. Unfortunately, until the end of the Cold War, national debates in this area were imbued with a damaging policy inherent to totalitarian regimes. Romania had to reshape its national strategy throughout history according to the various regional hegemonies that operated in this part of the world. These transformations were determined by the major changes in the global security environment that affected the regional security framework.

The period before the Great War was marked by a dangerous underestimation of national security policy. A political class subservient to clan interests often placed its own interests above national goals.

Romania was at that time a dismembered state, with large portions of territory under Russian (Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina), Hungarian (a large part of Transylvania) and Bulgarian (the Cadrilater) occupation. In 1914, Romania had to endure the pressure of the Great Powers to enter the war on the side of one camp or another. However, following its cultural and historical affinities, but especially as a result of promises from France that it would support the unification of Romanians from all provinces after the war, Romania opted for the Entente camp to the detriment of that of the Central Powers. This decision proved to be wise, considering that, after the war, the country found itself in the camp of the victors.

The interwar period marked a phase of significant economic growth for the unified Greater Romania, thanks to the national consensus and euphoria after the Great War. However, the rise to power of the Bolsheviks in Russia, a state with an insatiable appetite for expansionism to the detriment of all its neighbors, the emergence of the Nazi and fascist

regimes in Germany and Italy, as well as the increasing international isolation of Romania's former allies (France and Great Britain), constituted great threats against Romania, which found itself alone in the front of two great enemies, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Thus, in 1940, with the help of those two great enemies, as well as two neighboring states, the great territorial amputations took place through which Romania, defenseless, ceded Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR, Northern Transylvania to Hungary and the Cadrilater to Bulgaria.

In 1940, Romania opted for a conjunctural alliance with Nazi Germany, abandoning the guarantees of Western powers that were increasingly isolated on the international stage, a decision that could not prevent territorial amputations. The decision to fight alongside the Axis powers ultimately proved to be disastrous for the country, because at the end of the war it found itself on the camp of the losers. Although it regained Transylvania through the Paris Peace Treaty, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Cadrilater remained lost, apparently forever for Romania. Western powers, being far away and didn't help Romania.¹ Transylvania's return to the Motherland proved to be the beginning of a long period of territorial disputes between Romania and Hungary. Although communist ideology apparently froze the subject of Romanian-Hungarian confrontations, there was never any peace over this subject, and the end of the Cold War reopened this old wound, a subject of dispute between the two neighboring states.

Soviet success can be attributed to several factors, with the most significant being patriotism, national resilience, and the leadership of Stalin.²

The establishment of the communism in Romania consecrated the closure of the country in the "*camp of the states of popular democracy*". Officially, the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the country were guaranteed by the new "*popular*" Romanian army and by its faithful ally the Soviet Union. The process of communization of the Romanian Army brought the cadres of the old Royal Army into a dramatic situation, many of them being massively dismissed and thrown into the sinister communist prisons by the apparatchiks and political puppets of the new communist army. The communist Romanian army itself represented the greatest risk to Romania's national security, because in the event of a Soviet invasion, no Romanian soldier would have opposed the invading troops.³

[1] McMeekin, Sean *Stalin's War: A new History of World War II*, 275, Basic Books, April 20, 2021, 1541672798

[2] Overy, Richard, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet Effort: 1941-1945. Epilogue*. Penguin Books, August 1st, 1998, 9780140271690

[3] Obviously, our reasoning refers to the early years of the Romanian Army's communization, a period when it was effectively filled with the soldiers of the "Horia Cloșca și Crișan" and "Tudor Vladimirescu" Divisions, the famous large units formed by Romanian volunteers, indoctrinated with communist ideology after their captivity in the USSR. To these elements are added the political officers (apparatchiks belonging to the Nomenklatura and political puppets) tasked

The equipment, training and supply of the Romanian Army left much to be desired, while military commanders were trained in large numbers in Soviet military academies, where most of them were recruited by the GRU and KGB. Consequently, the feeling of belonging to the national values of the Romanian Army was almost nonexistent in the society of that historical period.



Figure 1 Entry of the Tudor Vladimirescu division in Bucharest in August 1944.
Below: King Michael I (right) reviewing the troops with General Nicolae Cambrea.

Source: Wikimedia

The Warsaw Treaty consecrated the presence of the Soviet troops on the national territories of the communist member states. Romania's national security was subordinated to the doctrinal and political-military concepts of the Soviet Union. The Romanian communist regime, obedient to the Kremlin, had proclaimed the supremacy of communist ideology, Soviet military strategy and doctrine. The development of a national defense strategy Romania's image within the Treaty, from a faithful and obedient ally of Moscow to a "maverick", whose marginalization in decision-making at the organizational level was increasingly evident, as Bucharest's attitude become increasingly hostile against the Pact.

The essential component of the new Romanian foreign policy adopted by Nicolae

with indoctrinating the military personnel. This situation changed radically after the takeover of power by Nicolae Ceaușescu, a national leader who, at that time, distanced himself from the Russians through his nationalist policy. (N.B.)

Ceașescu consisted in the emancipation of Romania from the political tutelage of the Soviet Union. The Romanian leader considered it important for Romania to create its own path of development, consecrating as fundamental principles of Romanian foreign policy mutual respect and equality between states, within international relations. A new defense doctrine was developed on this occasion, and new and promising perspectives opened up for the national defense industry, with the ultimate goal of completely eliminating imports of Soviet equipment and armaments. However, the practical application of this goal proved to be extremely difficult, due to the complexity of the task, the high standards to be respected, as well as a national defense doctrine, was impossible to achieve at that time. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania in 1958 and the takeover of power by Nicolae Ceașescu in 1965 completely changed the strategical situation. On this occasion, the nationalist-communist ideology replaced proletarian internationalism, and this changed in military production, as well as the lack of a qualified workforce in the field.

The 1970s decade marked an important step for Romania's national security. The concept of "the struggle of the entire people" was transposed by the communist regime into a scientific structural framework for the first time in Romanian history. A new national military doctrine was developed. Thus, practically every member of Romanian society, every citizen of the Socialist Republic of Romania was forced to participate in the defense effort of the socialist state, starting at an extremely young age. For the first time, the Romanian cities were spoken of as "fortresses of labor, struggle and defense of the entire people". The participation of all workers, peasants and intellectuals in the paramilitary formations as part of the Patriotic Guards was mandatory, becoming a mass phenomenon. The children of Socialist Romania were conscripted from the age of 5 into the political organizations of the "Falcons of the Homeland", nurseries of pioneer and communist youth organizations. Thus, the militarization of Romania had become total.

Although Romania was a full member of the Warsaw Pact, the defense plans were developed by the communist leaders in a multidirectional manner, according to the new national doctrine that considered that a possible attack against Romania could come from any geographical point, including from the Warsaw Pact allies. This proved to be a unique case among the members of the Treaty. The latter's official doctrine, developed by the Soviet Union, provided that an attack against the socialist states could only come from the NATO member states, with the United States as the main enemy, and not from the socialist states, a fact that was however contradicted by reality.⁴ As a result, the WPO's war plans⁵ were

[4] E.g. the cases of the uprising in the German Democratic Republic (1953), the rebellion in Hungary (1956), and the textbook example of the invasion by the socialist states (except Romania) of Czechoslovakia (1968) (N.B.)

[5] Warsaw Pact Organization - WPO (N.B.)

designed taking into consideration the foreseeable directions of a massive offensive initiated by NATO against the socialist camp. Of course, each member state of the Treaty was assigned specific tasks in the case of overall missions.

Given Romania's national particularities (its geostrategic position) as the only socialist state surrounded by socialist states, taking into consideration its outdated military equipment, as well as its reputation as a "maverick" within the organization, its role in the defense structures was of secondary importance, with Romanian troops being intended to carry out missions in the second echelon of the military structures, operating with reduced numbers of troops.

This strategic duality of Romania (the existence of a national defensive doctrine in which the enemy could also be a socialist state, as well as its role as a secondary power within the Treaty), made Romania a particular case in the Wider Black Sea Area. From the same perspective, the inconstancy and duplicity of the Romanian communist leaders weakened Romania's overall position during the Cold War.

Bucharest could no longer rely on the solidarity of the other socialist states in the same camp, and for them, Romania represented an unfaithful, unstable, recalcitrant ally, which, through its leaders, asked uncomfortable questions at every meeting of the Treaty, showing obvious nationalism attitude. At the end of the communist era, Romania represented for Western Europe a closed country, totally isolated from the international community, led by a tyrannical regime. For the other socialist leaders of the pre-transition period to capitalism, Ceaușescu represented the "scapegoat" for the deplorable situation in which Romania found itself before the outbreak of the events of December 1989, which put an end to that regime. Although the Romanian Revolution managed to definitively overthrow a criminal regime, on the other hand it created a breach in Romania's national security.

The end of the Cold War again changed the status of the Black Sea. The dismemberment of the Soviet Union changed the number of riparian states. (having Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Georgia). The new independent states, Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia, (although it is not found among the riparian states, Armenia has its geopolitical weight in the region) have "complicated" the regional geostrategic environment even more.

The Pontic file was marked after the fall of communism by an unprecedented fluidity of events. New risks, threats and dangers complete an already very loaded picture of the dissensions between the regional actors. Unpredictability has become a basic term in the regional security equation. The old union republics, with the fall of the Soviet regime, have found their own identities, aspirations for independence, but also pride. Cultural and ethnic fault lines are becoming more and more visible, fully contributing to the "thawing of frozen conflicts". (Transnistria, the Ukrainian problem, Crimeea, Georgia, Nagorno Karabach)

The new security environment entails new conflicts that redefine the states in the region and which have immense chances of spreading and contaminating the neighboring regions. Moreover, cross-border organized crime, terrorism, secessionism, ethnic and territorial disputes, religious fundamentalism, nationalisms, create the image of a convulsive society. We will add to these phenomena the difficulties of the transition to a open market economy, economic, political and social restructuring, accompanied by a strong recrudescence of corruption. The inability of the rulers to master these realities, as well as the strong decrease in the credibility of the political class of the new states, are transformed into real threats to the national security of the states in the region. The fall of communism dramatically changed the security and defense architecture of the Wider Black Sea Area. Before the collapse of the USSR, WPO and NATO troops were positioned in the region face to face. This represented an important stake in the fight for global strategic supremacy, having as main advantages, important strategic objectives, extremely well-placed Soviet naval bases in the Black Sea area, Red Army radars based on Snake Island, which monitored the movements of the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean, American military bases in Turkey and last but not least the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits.

Until 1991, four states from two major political-military organizations (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Treaty Organization), the Soviet Union, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, shared the shores of the Black Sea. The dissolution of the Soviet colossus doubled their number, through the emergence of new states. Thus, the new configuration includes Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Georgia and Turkey. After the release of positive energies on the occasion of the fall of communism, a dark future was foreshadowed for the states in the region.

In the current post-Cold War framework, a new security paradigm replaces the specific security environment of the Cold War, a conflict based on deterrence, which ensured regional stability and security. The new threats, vulnerabilities, challenges and asymmetric risks that have emerged since then have demonstrated an undeniable reality, that the philosophers and dialecticians of Marxism-Leninism have analyzed, debated, foreseen and accepted the specific effects of the transition of society from capitalism to socialism. However, no one has been able to foresee the process of transition from socialism to capitalism.

Under these conditions, the framework of cooperation between the states belonging to the socialist bloc was suppressed and replaced with a “frozen” security system whose main characteristics are distrust, suspicion, threat, dissension, competition in all areas, lack of cooperation to ensure a climate of stability. Neighboring states were perceived as potential enemies, and Russia set out on the path of recovering its old imperial status.

These elements form, in our opinion, the substance and core of the “frozen security paradigm” after the Cold War. At the same time, these states represent the pillars of a conceptual model that redefines the security environment of the Black Sea specific to the transition period between the “bipolar paradigm of the Cold War” and that of the “frozen security after the end of the Cold War”. The framework of mutual cooperation that, after 1990, formed the security system of the Black Sea was undermined by these egocentric manifestations specific to a “childhood of capitalism” as well as to a world in transition. These negative manifestations delayed the development of the region and, at the same time, abundantly fueled the anxiety of Western states regarding their desire to expand their sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.



Figure 2 Participation of the Romanian delegation in the signing of the official act of dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty. Prague, 1st of July 1991. Source: Agerpress

Over the course of twenty years, three specific security paradigms have influenced regional order. The first of them is known as the “Cold War security paradigm”. It emerged in 1945-1946. Although we cannot make an exact definition of its appearance, we nevertheless consider that a landmark element could be Winston Churchill's famous speech at Fulton, when he referred extremely plastically to the fall of an iron curtain over Europe. It would have been possible, however, that the end of the paradigm occurred at the time of the meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush in Malta, in early December

1989. There would be two other possible moments to which we could link the end of this paradigm, and these would be the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, or, why not, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. The latter version seems to us the most probable because it symbolizes the effective dissolution of a relationship between two military forces, the main pillars that were the basis of the Cold War. With the disappearance of the conflict, the paradigm that defined it also disappeared.



Figure 3 The new states issued after the dissolution of former Soviet Republics, parts of USSR: 1. Armenia; 2. Azerbaidjan; 3. Belarus; 4. Estonia; 5. Georgia; 6. Kazakhstan; 7. Kîrgîzstan; 8. Letonia; 9. Lituania; 10. Republica Moldova; 11. Rusia; 12. Tadjikistan; 13. Turkmenistan; 14. Ucraina; 15. Uzbekistan. Source: Wikimedia

The paradigm of "frozen security" was the successor to that of the Cold War. Its main characteristic is the lack of cooperation, which is based on a whole series of elements that accompanied the period of conflict between the two great powers. This period is one of transition between two paradigms, the next of which can be considered one of cooperation between states. At the same time, it is a landmark on the path to capitalism and the market economy of the former communist states and coincides, as chronological landmarks, with the period of unipolarity that occurred after the loss of Russia's geostrategic, political, military and economic supremacy, following the collapse of the USSR.

One of the greatest challenges to Romania's national security at the end of the Cold War was the fragmentation of state unity in the region. The entities belonging to the former Soviet space triggered a secessionist process, as a result of the strong surges of nationalism resulting from the dissolution of the ideological shell. This, during the Soviet period, proved to be the ideological binder that held the union republics together. The irrepressible desire of nationalists in Chechnya, Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia, as well as in the other republics, confirms, if necessary, the reorientation of each of these entities towards their civilizations of origin.

In the new environment corresponding to the frozen security paradigm, the core and foundation of the Cold War were replaced by the pillars of a new conceptual construction. The concept of deterrence was replaced by suspicion. The states in the region have always feared Russia's military power, but at the same time, they expressed real fears towards each other. The confrontation between ideologies was replaced by the existential problems of regional actors. The former union republics tried, in contact with the European powers, to Westernize their policies, but they remained largely dependent on Russia's energy resources. Although Romania and Bulgaria were confronted with the same economic problems, they knew better than other states how to manage their opening to the West. Romania, for example, has always shown obvious bitterness towards Russia, as the legal heir of the former USSR. A large majority of civil society unequivocally expressed its fully justified desire for Romania to be fully aligned with the values of Western society, in the midst of which it belongs. For many Romanians, Russia after the USSR continued to represent the hereditary enemy.

Currently, the greatest danger to the states of the region is Russia, the threat being accentuated by the Kremlin's insatiable appetite for new territories, and the current aggression against Ukraine does nothing but amplify Putin's speech at one of his annual conferences, in which he specified extremely clearly that "Russia has no borders, it only has horizons". "Russia is itself a boundless universe", and even more than that, stating bluntly that "Russia is the Universe itself, it does not need anyone". ⁶

[6] Reference: <https://hotnews.ro/noua-politica-externa-a-rusiei-putin-rusia-nu-are-granite-doar-orizonturi-73057>