

POLITICS

One More Push for NATO

Romania has moved fast to take advantage of the change in the international environment. But more needs to be done to secure a national long-term gain out the latest international developments.

The dramatic attack on the US and the consequent international campaign against terror occurred at a moment when Romania's perspectives to be invited to join NATO in 2002 had become quite feeble. This outlook has now changed. However, as stagnation in a discouraging situation was replaced by sheer uncertainty, the opportunity may well exist for an improved outlook of Romania, if it plays its cards soundly. Granting swiftly to NATO the right to use the Romanian air space was about all that could have been done in the first days next to the attack. To score in the months to come, however, Romania needs to carefully consider the changes in the security environment, and shape its policies accordingly.

There are at least two major areas that were affected by the September 11 events:

1. Border security and law enforcement agencies reform

Romania's request to have the Schengen visas lifted was already facing opposition from some EU member states. With the new emphasis on borders security, Romania must prove itself able to secure its borders, which are likely to become those of the enlarged Europe. This is easier said than done, however, as it needs upgrading the overall capacity of the border police and imposing a tighter control on foreign residents or immigrants to Romania. The good part is that the EU is not merely formulating this requirement, but is also sponsoring its implementation. An action plan for increasing the capacity of the task force involved, in order to turn it into a professional body, is needed without delay. For years such a strategy was hindered by the

use of conscripts and the hesitation to move towards the demilitarization of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It is to be noted, in this context, that the new anti-corruption strategy does not place enough emphasis on curbing corruption within law enforcement agencies – this phenomenon is actually poorly researched, and tends to be understated by authorities and exaggerated by the media. In all logic, however, it is the cleaning of these agencies, which should precede any anti-corruption campaign.

2. The stress on transparency of the international financial markets, national banks and businesses as a weapon against money laundering and money making by terrorist groups.

The situation of Romania is at least awkward at this chapter, as transparency of the banking sector is notoriously absent and led to many scandals in the past decade. An exercise of demanding information on the banking accounts of public officials suspected of corruption did not return any answers at all². Romanian newspapers were keen to report that many Arab-owned businesses in Romania had failed to pay any taxes, while having important profits. The impunity of many such firms, some suspected of harboring convicted criminals who cannot be expelled due to a generous interpretation of the Constitution, is attributed to their alleged connections with high-ranking officials in precisely the fields of Home and Justice Affairs³. These connections date back to 1989 and there are grounds to suspect that a network of former Securitate businessmen are deeply entangled with Middle Eastern businesses based in Romania, some close to Palestinian organizations⁴. While depriving Vadim Tudor of his parliamentary immunity for his public statement on Romania having trained Hamas fighters after 1989, the Romanian authorities should not regard lightly the warning underlying this spectacular statement. Vadim may be wrong on details, but Ceausescu's policy of closeness to the Palestinian régime and other Middle Eastern not-quite-so democratic countries, seen amongst others in the large numbers of citizens of those countries studying in Romania on grants of the Romanian Government, is certain to have left a legacy. Instead of denouncing press reports on this situation, the Government would better come clean on each and every alleged case. Smuggling and tax evasion may be common practice among small Arab investors in Bucharest, but alleged dirty practices involving important characters of the Government party should be proved wrong with more than words. It is high time to give up the Arab connection, which produced notorious characters such as Youssef Nassar, Zaher Iskandarani or Omar Hayssam, proved to have befriended frontline Romanian politicians or military. We have no electoral campaign in sight and no political competition to speak of, so the need for electoral dirty money is less acute than it was in other past circumstances. This is one more good reason for the Prime Minister to investigate all alleged ties of Romanian

² Report by Valerian Stan, Romanian Helsinki Committee.

³ Such as the former secret service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

⁴ See both Adevarul, and Romania Libera, Friday, October 19, 2001

politicians with such characters and practices and to prevent them in the future. The elimination of Vadim Tudor, the stout supporter of Saddam Hussein, from Romanian politics is a necessary step and has been long due. But it is far from being the only step needed.

Romania has an important opportunity, not only to survive unscathed the war on terror, as its economy is still relatively isolated and tied more with Europe than the US, but also to prove to NATO that it is no longer the country which harbored Carlos, trained terrorists and linked its business fortune to dubious Middle-East companies. This must be done while protecting the law-abiding Arab businessmen in Romania, who may benefit themselves by such a cleaning operation. How to attack, however, a group with old ties to former Securitate and dignitaries of Communist times, of which many still have friends within the administration or had managed to remain themselves part of the power establishment? The answer is plain: it is highly unlikely that such groups have the potential to create serious internal trouble now, so it becomes a matter of political will to eliminate old cronies turned into liabilities or check if any of the Ceausescu's times characters who still play a role in politics and business today do not still hang out with rogue states businesses⁵. Between NATO and the Romanian public opinion, the Government has only allies to support such a cleansing operation. Dismantling the networks involved in smuggling goods, people and profits is a long due operation, stated in the numerous anti-crime and anti-corruption programs never carried out so far. Most of the gangs involved have also a political connection, which is a legacy of Ceausescu's foreign policy. For the first time Romania has a serious incentive in getting itself rid of all traces of this dubious past and it should move swiftly to appoint a new generation of law enforcement executives, able to clean their organizations, and with a clear mandate to this effect⁶.

⁵ Ministers of Foreign Affairs have been giving them up since 1996, but in many cases ministers were not even aware such characters still exist.

⁶ Internal Affairs Minister Ioan Rus did start on this path dismissing hundreds of law enforcement officers. It is however the key positions which matter. Romania badly needs to train on spot or by means of intensive courses abroad a young generation of law enforcement top executives.

Trend analysis: Business as Usual in Romanian Politics

Despite a slow decrease in the trust in Government, Romanians remain overall confident in the ability of this Government and the Prime Minister to run the country. The main opposition institution, and most times practically the only one, is Bucharest Mayor Traian Basescu, who still enjoys the only challenging position in polls. The Government Party is completely unchallenged, however, as the latest polls show it to still have half of the popular support, with democratic parliamentary opposition parties below 10% and Greater Romania in a temporary setback.

Fig. 2. Political preferences

Political parties	%
PSD	52
PRM	14
PNL	9
PD	9
UDMR	7
PNTCD	3
ApR	2
PUR	1
UFD	1
Other party	2
Undecided	42

Although the report between the Government and the political opposition has remained unchanged for the past six months, the pattern of trust in public institutions suffered slight changes. The Church and the Army continue to enjoy most of the public trust, and the hierarchy of the political institutions shows the political parties in the lowest position, with the Parliament performing only slightly better. **The novelty is that the Prime Minister is for the first time doing better than the President.**

The hierarchy of public trust also shows the television as the main influential political actor. Antena 1 dominates in the hierarchy of TV networks, despite not enjoying full national coverage, followed by TVR, which is the only national network, and PROTV, once the best preferred station but which is now ranking only the third in the top. Despite television being so popular in general, the TV stations, which came under attack lately by the print press for their alleged uncritical behavior towards the Government, are not doing as well as they did a couple of years ago.

Fig. 3. Public mood regarding life and Government

Romania headed in the good direction	%
Agree	43.2
Disagree	42.8
Current Government able to improve social and economical situation	%
Agree	47.4
Disagree	37.5
Life after nine months the Government changed is...	%
Better	13.1
Same	47.2
Worse	37.4

Fig. 4. Trust in public institutions

Institution	Mean (Standard Deviation)	Institution	Mean (Standard Deviation)
Churches	5.83 (1.65)	Newspapers	3.32 (1.73)
Army	4.82 (1.80)	Police	3.22 (1.76)
Television	4.22 (1.67)	Trade Unions	2.97 (1.92)
The Prime Minister	3.95 (1.96)	Members of Parliament	2.50 (1.57)
The President	3.87 (2.07)	Political parties	2.38 (1.49)

Fig. 5. Favorite TV Station

Network	%
Antena1	20.7
TVR1	15.9
PROTV	14.5
Prima	5.4
Acasă	3.6
OTV	0.6
Duna	0.6
TVR2	0.4
TV Internațional	0.1
Tele7abc	0.1
Total	100.0

Basic nationalism high, conflict potential moderate to low

Romanians tend to understate the situation of the Roma, which is objectively extremely poor (see Social section of this EWR). A majority believes the Roma are not discriminated against. Bucharest residents are the least likely to admit that Roma are discriminated, but no other correlation can be found between personal wealth or occupational status and the sympathy for the Roma. Previous studies have shown that a considerable segment of

Romanians believe the Roma to be quite rich⁷. Such a perception, based on the neighborhoods of prosperous Rromani, which sprouted in the last decade, is hindering the acknowledgement of the poor social condition of the majority of ethnic Roma.

⁷ Ethno-Barometer Romania, Cluj, 2001.

A majority of the Romanians do not believe that there is a conflict between Romanians and Hungarians, despite recent front-page coverage of the Status bill dispute between Romania and Hungary. The figure is remarkably stable compared to previous evaluations⁸. Also in line with previous reports, the perception of a conflict is higher in non-mixed areas such as Moldova, compared to Transylvania and Banat where it is remarkably low⁹.

The evolution of our nationalism items shows moderate improvement at the two identically measured items in EWR 1¹⁰ and EWR 6, cultural nationalism and opinions on the international organizations. The percentage of people believing that only those who know the official language should vote decreased considerably from 45 to 38 %, while those defending Romania's sovereign economic policy against the IMF and the EU decreased by almost 3%.

Fig. 6. Public perceptions of ethnic issues

	Some people believe the Rroma are discriminated compared to Romanians in our country. What do you personally believe? (%)	Some people believe there is a conflict going on between Romanians and Hungarians. What do you think? (%)
Agree	8.8	42.9
Agree in part	29.3	
Disagree	57.7	47.7

Territorial and ethnic nationalism remain, however, considerably high. Around 57 % of Romanians strongly or moderately agree that Romania should fight to recuperate territories lost to neighboring countries. Fight does not mean necessarily going to war, but the figure is nevertheless high. Also 44% of Romanians consider that ethnic groups pose a threat by their disloyal behavior, which is rather high, although in line with previously reported results¹¹. Basic nationalist attitudes remain high.

The explanatory models of subjective ethnic conflict validate two classic hypotheses: a. the role of nationalist leaders and b. the role of a genuine nationalist predisposition, which complement each other. Nationalism is a more powerful factor than trust in political leaders when tested separately, however. Equally, regions matter more than leaders, but differently than we would expect them to. Transylvania and Crisana-Maramures, with the largest proportion of Hungarian population, behave very similarly to Wallachia and Bucharest, that is, they are more likely to perceive a conflict than not when adequate controls are active. Banat has a cosmopolitan pattern of cohabitation, confirmed by a negative correlation with subjective conflict.

⁸ Mungiu-Pippidi, Alina. *Transilvania subiectiva*, Bucuresti: Humanitas, 1999.

⁹ Abraham, Dumitru, Chelcea, Septimiu and Badescu, Ion. *Interethnic Relations in Romania*, Cluj-Napoca: Carpatica, 1995

¹⁰ Which quoted a March 2000 CURS poll.

¹¹ See Alina Mungiu Pippidi, De la identitate nationala la nationalism. *Sfera Politicii* 98-99.

Fig. 8. Subjective ethnic conflict by region

Region	There is a conflict going on between Romanians and Hungarians	
	Agree %	Disagree %
Moldova	55.2	39.6
Muntenia	42.4	47.6
Dobrogea	65.9	18.1
Oltenia	49.1	26.8
Banat	29.8	59.6
Transilvania	29.3	66.7
Crisana-Maramures	13.0	52.2
Bucuresti	37.9	53.6

Fig. 9. Varieties of nationalism

On nationalism...	Agree %	Disagree %
Romania is a country both rich and beautiful but its proper development is prevented by its enemies	59.0	17.6
Only people who speak the official language should vote (cultural nationalism)	38.6	35.3
No international organization such as the EU or the IMF should tell Romanians how to run their own country	53.3	17.4
There are ethnic groups within Romania which act regularly against our national interest	44.4	21.0
There are parts of other countries which really belong to us and we should fight to get them back	56.7	21.3

Perception of ethnic conflict is indeed highly subjective. We found no relation between exposure to the media and conflict perception. Since individuals in our sample overwhelmingly use television as a source of information, it seems that people react to coverage of the Romanian-Hungarian relation differently and along the lines of their predispositions. People who hold basic nationalistic attitudes are not democrats. *Individuals who believe democracy is not the best system of Government are more likely to perceive a conflict between Romanians and Hungarians.*

Path Model

The path model confirmed these findings (see the “Path Model” diagram in Annex 1 at the end of this Report), and brought additional confirmation for some of our hypotheses. The index of regional development, which replaced the regions from the OLS regression models described above, revealed national identity and trust in the outside world as significant predictors. **The lower the development in a region, the greater the xenophobia and the parochialism of its inhabitants, and the lesser the identification with the nation as a whole.** Furthermore, ‘non-ideologues’, the people who find political ideology *irrelevant* are more likely to be ‘parochial’ than ‘national’. National identity in turn does not predict nationalism.

Trust in the outside world is also determined by political competence (reading political reports in newspapers) and subjective well-being. Frustration with one’s life and low political competence, therefore, determine distrust in the outside world. In turn, distrust in the outside world triggers trust in nationalist leaders and nationalism. Low political sophistication, high frustration, high political assertiveness and low trust in the outside world determine nationalist attitudes. At the same time, nationalism and lack of democratic orientation are strong predictors of subjective ethnic conflict.