

Romania's actorness in the immediate eastern neighbourhood [external and internal perceptions]

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SUMMARY

Against the current geopolitical competition between the transatlantic community and Russia over the 'shared neighbourhood' in Eastern Europe, Romania's contribution to the stability and security of its immediate eastern vicinity appears more relevant than ever before.

The present paper inquires whether Romania has in fact the foreign policy capacity and resources to play a much more active role in its immediate neighbourhood and, thus, contribute to strengthening the regional stability and security. We bring into question Romania's capacity to act as an effective foreign policy entrepreneur in the eastern neighbourhood by making two points.

The **first argument** is that at the current stage Romania's actorness is objectively underdeveloped, which means that a capabilities-expectations gap exists at the level of Romania's foreign policy. The **second argument** indicates that at the time being 'policy-taking' rather than 'policy-making' seems to be the usual blueprint for conducting international affairs, and in this regard, Romania's actorness in immediate neighbourhood hinges very much on the international organisations it belongs to – the EU and NATO.

To back-up these arguments, we constructed an analytical framework for assessing state international capacity (namely, state power and influence a state carries externally), based on a six-factor index comprising both hard and soft elements of power (such as size and geographic location, economy and military, historical experience and culture, domestic institutional capacity, and membership in international organizations). We then investigated how the image of Romania is perceived in the neighbourhood, namely in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, according to each of the aforementioned factors. To this end, we employed a triple methodological perspective: we first applied **discourse analysis** to understand how Romania is portrayed in the two countries' official discourse. In the second stage, we looked at the data from **two original surveys**, conducted at the national level in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, to see what the societal perceptions in the two neighbouring countries reveal about Romania's state power and influence. In the third stage, we conducted **semi-structured interviews** with experts from both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in order to acquire a much more in-depth view over Romania's actorness. Finally, we reviewed our research results, first, against the findings we drew from semi-structured interviews in Romania with academics, experts and policy-makers and, second, against the discourse of the Romanian foreign policy establishment.

The policy-recommendations suggest that in order to become a much more visible actor in the Romania – Ukraine – the Republic of Moldova regional triangle (and also in the wider eastern neighbourhood), Romania needs to be very clear and opened about its political intentions in the eastern neighbourhood and to show political determination to play a proactive role in the region.

It is, thus, hoped that this paper provides at the policy-making level at least some basis for thinking about ways of strengthening Romania's actorness in the region, which, could, in turn, lead to increased regional stability and security.



INTRODUCTION

With the growing volatility in the former Soviet space, Romania is directly concerned by the present developments in the region. Even before the commencement of the Ukraine events, Romania had been considered by its Western allies a stability bastion at the eastern edge of the transatlantic community which could act as a bridge between 'east' and 'west', in engaging with the countries of the eastern neighbourhood¹. As such, Romania itself started to assume, at least at the discursive level, a much more active role in the region and to display a strong interest in the relationship with the eastern vicinity². Yet, so far, apart from initiating a policy framework (namely, the Black Sea Synergy) which, ultimately, did not manage to become a perennial one and was soon overshadowed by the Eastern Partnership, Romania has not been fully able to carve out a prominent role for itself in its immediate neighbourhood. This has pushed the country to choose either to strengthen the already existing foreign policy for the region (such as the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership) or to hew to the EU/NATO political decisions, following the cues of major allies such as the United States, Germany or France. Thus, in the past years 'decision-taking' rather than 'decision-making' has appeared to be Romania main foreign policy feature at the international level (including in relationship to the eastern vicinity), whereby the country's external behaviour appears to be largely tributary to the lines of action shaped by the partnership with its closest security ally, the United States, and by the institutions to which it currently belongs (namely, the EU and NATO).

Nevertheless, a common impression persists that Romania has untapped potential to play a much more visible foreign policy role in the region and that currently it 'punches below its weight'. According to this line of thought, the size of Romania's territory and population make the country a candidate for the medium power-tier of states able to project sufficient power externally. This might be true. In fact, Romania is, after Poland, the second biggest EU member in Central and Eastern Europe, and third biggest NATO ally, after Turkey and Poland in the region. However, we believe this 'medium power'-related interpretation is incomplete, since other factors which determine state power and international influence (such as, the economic and military resources, alongside with a country's soft power or ability to forge external policies in cooperation with other states or to hold sway in the international organizations it belongs to, etc.) need to be taken into account for an accurate assessment of a country's external potential. In addition, some questions should be addressed from the outset:

First, considering its relevant size and strategic location importance, why the Romanian foreign policy establishment does not seek to develop a comprehensive external agenda towards the eastern neighbourhood, preferring instead to resume itself to a limited approach, most of time centred primarily on the Republic of Moldova?

Second, is Romania, indeed, a medium power or is this practice of willingly outsourcing foreign policy to the broader transatlantic community an indication, in fact, of a small power behaviour?

Third, is Romania's quiet conduct of external affairs justified by a feeling of vulnerability in the current geopolitical context of Eastern Europe or is just a consequence of the lack of solid resources and/or political determination based on which a more ambitious foreign policy could be built?

To solve this puzzle, we wonder if Romania's foreign policy towards the near abroad is an appropriate one by looking at the relationship with the immediate neighbours, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and by studying how Romania's external actions are perceived/received in the two neighbouring countries. We call into question Romania's capacity to wield actorness in the neighbourhood and, in this regard, we argue that Romania's limited actorness could be objectively explained by the limited resources at the country's disposal.

To this research goal, we have designed an analytical framework aimed at studying state power and external influence based on a six-factor model. The first three are the so-called *material factors*, which are usually fixed (that is, they are given and cannot be easily altered) and refer to 1) size (namely, surface and population) and geographic location, 2) economic weight and 3) military capabilities. Specifically, in the case of the first factor, the country's size is understood to be a salient asset, since usually large states wield considerable influence, while small states are seldom seen as influential³. Moreover, size often determines whether a state is dependent (or not) on international organizations (such as NATO & EU) to compensate for its external limitations⁴. Concurrently, a state's strategic location could be perceived as influential, provided the respective state is able to project power from its whereabouts. Similarly, the economic resources (including here the market size and the significance of the GDP and trade flows in the regional configuration) and the military capabilities (namely, the size of the defence budget, the availability of trained and equipped armed forces) place a high premium on a country's potential to wield a strong foreign and security policy.

The other three factors which constitute international influence are of a *nonmaterial* nature and variable (that is, they are defined by the ability of a state

to pursue a given policy at a certain time). These latter factors entail a normative nature (namely, they are linked to the international reputation of a state and to the use of diplomatic instruments): 1) the historical experience and culture, 2) domestic institutional capacity (and expertise) to hold sway over international negotiations, 3) membership in international organizations. While the historical and cultural track record shapes the image according to which a state is perceived abroad, strong institutional capacity and expertise at home are paramount to wield influence over international negotiations, to underpin foreign policy ambitions and/or to build good reputation and credibility externally. Last but not least, the membership in international organizations is salient nowadays, not only because a member state has the ability to forge alliances and count on multilateral support when pursuing external actions, but also because the participation in international institutions confers legitimacy to a country's foreign policy.

Our six-factor model is embedded in the literature addressing state power and influence; yet, the analytical framework presented above does not claim to provide a fully conclusive and exhaustive account of all possible factors which propel a state's capacity to wield power externally. This model has been only designed as a heuristic instrument which, in our view, helps us better assess Romania's existing resources and to support our arguments.

METHODOLOGY

While the focus of our analysis is on the aforementioned six-factor model and on what this model tells us when assessing Romania's actorness, we employed a mixed methodological approach, including qualitative and quantitative research instruments to better gauge the importance of these factors for the country's foreign policy. In our case, the study makes use of:

discourse analysis

survey data

interviews

First, in order to assess how Romania is portrayed in the official discourse of the two neighbouring countries, we employed **discourse analysis**, which allowed us to distinguish the main narratives and highlight different discursive representations while interpreting the meanings 'beyond the sentence'⁵. The studied text corpus included official documents, speeches, statements, press releases, officials' public interviews available online related to Ukraine's and the Republic of Moldova's relations with Romania, while the period under study was 2009-2019. Covering a ten-year timeframe adds a significant value to the analysis, since it brings about a deeper understanding of the impact various external events and challenges in the region have had on the perception of Romania in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

Second, to explore the societal perceptions, we conducted **nation-wide questionnaire-based surveys** both in Ukraine and in the Republic of Moldova. This method was selected, since surveys are usually best suited when a large pool of respondents is desired⁶. The surveys were conducted by two contracted companies (one for Ukraine, one for the Republic of Moldova) in September 2019 and were based on a representative quota sample. The sample size for Ukraine included 2000 participants, while for the Republic of Moldova the sample size included 1212 participants from both rural and urban areas; the sample size respected gender, age, and regional breakdown of the population in each country. The survey questions (identical for each country) were grouped around six main sections corresponding to each of the factors, which, according to our analysis, shape a country's external profile, namely: size (surface and population) and geographic location; economic weight; military capabilities; historical experience and culture;

domestic institutional capacity and expertise; membership in international organizations.

Third, to study perceptions at the expert level, we conducted **in-depth interviews**, since this method represents a comprehensive tool for the purpose of our analysis⁷. Similar to the survey questionnaire, all the interviews were structured upon a previously developed interview guide with open-ended questions which mainly focused on the six factors mentioned above. Face-to-face interviews with experts, academics and policy-makers were conducted in the Ukrainian language in Kyiv and Chernivtsi (15 interviews), Ukraine, in November 2019 and in the Romanian language in Chişinău (13 interviews), the Republic of Moldova, in December 2019. The interviews were recorded upon the respondents' consent. The anonymity of some respondents was kept upon their request^{*}. The lists of the respondents are available in the annexes.

Finally, we reviewed our main findings from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine against the Romanian internal perceptions. Thus, we used discourse analysis for exploring Romania's official discourse towards its two neighbours. Furthermore, 12 interviews were conducted via Skype in Romania in March-April 2020 to explore how Romania's foreign policy in the region is assessed by the Romanian expert community^{**}. The structure of the interview guide was similar to the one for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

^{*} The anonymous respondents were not cited in the text; however, the information provided by them was analysed together with the other responses and used in the argumentation.

^{**} Neither the interviewees nor the participants in the survey were rewarded (financially or otherwise) for taking part in the study.

**1. ROMANIA'S ACTORNESS IN ITS EASTERN VICINITY:
EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS FROM UKRAINE**

1.1 Size (surface and population) and geographic location

The 2014 annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression in the Donbass region represented a turning point for Ukraine. This altered Ukraine's perception of its vicinity. While before 2014 relations between Ukraine and Romania were rather glacial, characterized by a certain level of mutual mistrust, 2014 saw a recalibration of Ukraine's discourse and new opportunities of interaction with Romania. In fact, 'the former regional competition between Ukraine and Romania loses its relevance against growing security challenges from Russia'⁸. Specifically, in 2014, when Bucharest top officials clearly condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Romania was listed among the top 'privileged partners'⁹ and 'real allies'¹⁰ of Ukraine. Ever since 2014, when Romania also became the first EU member state to ratify the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, the country has been constantly portrayed in the official discourse of Ukraine as a staunch supporter of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity¹¹. Thus, the two countries experienced a 'new impetus' at the level of the bilateral relations, having made a significant step forward, compared to the previously existing atmosphere of mistrust and competition¹².

This 'reset' in the bilateral relation has been also acknowledged by the vast majority of the interviewed experts. They mentioned 2014 as a turning point that has altered the nature of the neighbouring relations from cool, anxious, tense, stereotypes- and prejudices-driven towards positive and partnership-oriented.

” *Until 2014, the relations between Ukraine and Romania were, to put it mildly, rather cool, for many reasons [...]. A positive shift in the relations happened in 2014 as a result of Russia's aggression, the occupation and the attempt of the illegal annexation of Crimea. The common [for Ukraine and Romania] interests in the Black Sea security have been so powerful that they dominate all unresolved problems and disagreements.*

Natalya Belitser

” *At first it was about competition, mutual accusations, prejudices [...]. The 2014 Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine is one of milestone [in the relations]. Here, I notice a change in the perception of Romanians [...]. Few people know, but those who know were touched by this – when the first shootings took place on the Maidan, Romania was one of the first to send planes to take the wounded to the Romanian hospitals.*

Sergiy Gerasymchuk

” *In 2014 we have moved from a period of anxious relations, when Romania was regarded as the one threatening the Ukrainian state. [...]. Bucharest was among the first to support [Ukraine] both politically at the international arena, and in the military and technical cooperation in the Black Sea, in the security issues and information exchange. This has compensated the negative trends which has previously existed between the two countries.*

Yaroslav Matiychyk

”

Until 2014 there were cool relationships [...], there were stereotypes [...]. After Euromaidan, the support by the Romanian civil society, Romania's assistance to the Ukrainian military – all these have had a very positive impact on Romania's perception in Ukraine. During the aggression [of the Russian Federation] against Ukraine, Romania totally supported the preservation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine that generated high level of trust [towards Romania] among Ukrainians.

Serhii Hakman

”

A pivotal change happened during the aggression of the Russian Federation, which has altered the strategic situation in the Black Sea region [...]. This definitely has changed the whole context. And all the warnings, phobias, some of which still existing, were pushed back into the shadow.

Andrii Veselovskyi

”

Only since 2014 Romania has been perceived not as a threat, but as a partner of Ukraine.

Mykola Kapitonenko

”

The 2014 Revolution of Dignity has changed the situation, depriving Romania's status of an opponent [of Ukraine]. [...]. When Ukraine has gone through a drastic transformation and a critical situation, our neighbours [Romania] accepted the new government, the revolution of dignity – that is an advantage. The Romanian experience of farewell with the Ceaușescu regime contributed to this.

Yevhen Mahda

As far as the geographic location is concerned, in Ukraine's official discourse Romania is largely referred to as a neighbouring country with emphasis on the common border/borderlands (often in the context of cross-border cooperation projects) and on regional initiatives (such as, in the Black Sea, in the Eastern Partnership, or within the Ukraine – Moldova – Romania triangle)¹³.

At the expert level, the overall perceptions of Romania's size and geographic location have been split. On the one hand, the attributes related to size and geographic location are seen as not so much important in the present-day world given that other indicators, for instance, national income, total GDP and/or military spending are better suited to determine power and influence in the current international relations.

”

I do not think that territory- and population-size is a factor of influence. [...]. First of all, it is about the level of political influence, decision-making, support of the great powers.

Serhii Hakman

”

I do not consider the size of the territory and the population to be a factor of influence. In my opinion, national income, total GDP and military spending are the main indicators today. Against this backdrop, Romania is far behind Russia and Turkey, therefore its impact in the region is insignificant. Looking at the territory, the situation for Romania will not change much, since Romania will still lag behind Russia and Turkey. It is a medium state within the Black Sea region. And the possibilities to influence either the neighbours or the agenda and developments in the region as a whole are limited.

Mykola Kapitonenko

On the other hand, some experts believe that territory and population still matter in regional and international affairs, especially in those linked to Eastern Europe. As such, the experts characterize Romania as a relatively important country, neither big nor small, but rather belonging to the medium-tier of states in the region, which makes quite effective use of its potential. The overall societal perception of Romania's geographical location is rather favourable – 47.7% of respondents think it is advantageous or somewhat advantageous. The main benefit of Romania's geographical location is justified, according to the experts, by the country's ability to be a so-called 'facilitator of interests' for the EU and NATO both in the Black Sea and in the Balkans (provided that sufficient political will on behalf of Romania's authorities is available). At the same time, as expressed by the experts, this location might also carry strategic disadvantages, since geography may prove to be a challenge when a state finds itself at the junction of two unstable regions or when a state is situated on the borderline of an alliance. Thus, the 'regional security complexes' which border Romania might represent a litmus test for Romania's capacity and readiness to exercise actorness.

Moreover, among the experts there is a tendency to compare Romania's potential in terms of size and geographical location to other states in the region, first and foremost, with Ukraine itself, which is significantly bigger surface- and population-wise and richer in natural resources due to its extensive territory. Such comparison contributes to the perception that Romania is not sufficiently influential in terms of size and geography. This is indicated also at the societal level given that only 18.6% of Ukrainians consider or somewhat consider Romania to be a large country surface- and 16.6% population-wise. Furthermore, only 23.9% of respondents think that Romania's size (surface and population) confers the country necessary conditions to exert influence in the region.

”

Romania is noticeable in the Balkan region [...]. If we take geographic parameters, in the Balkan region it is second after Turkey.

Sergiy Fedunyak

”

Romania by population and territory [...] is not small at all. And this factor plays its role, including an impact on Romania's perception by its neighbours, because 20mln state is perceived more seriously than 3mln state, and this especially affects relations with other major powers. [...]. This might be Soviet syndromes in a foreign policy school, but there is such a perception. In this part of the world territory and population matter. [...]. Geographical location of Romania has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that Romania can act as a facilitator of interests for the EU and NATO both in the Black Sea and in the Balkans. The disadvantage is that both the Black Sea and the Balkans are now a very unstable region. In fact, I see Romania's ambition to play a role not only in the Black Sea but also in the Balkans, but I do not know if Romania's potential is sufficient to cover both regions, given that both regions are subject to geopolitical competition where more than two players are currently involved: Russia, the EU, the United States, and also China [...].

Sergiy Gerasymchuk

1.2. Economic weight

Ukraine's increasing preoccupation with the economic dimension of the bilateral agenda is highlighted in the country's discourse¹⁴. Thus, the focus on the economy and the need to enhance economic ties is always present in the official discourse of Ukraine vis-à-vis Romania with frequent references to the new possibilities for cooperation opened by the comprehensive zone of free trade with the EU envisaged within the Association Agreement¹⁵. Romania's experience of adapting its standards to the European ones in the economic field is regarded as useful for the Ukrainian business¹⁶. In fact, ever since 2014 the volume of the bilateral trade between the two countries has been constantly increasing¹⁷. In the past trade exchanges were low, while Ukrainian consumers were not familiar with the Romanian products. For instance, 58.3% of Ukraine's population has never bought any products produced in Romania, whilst 14.7% (mostly those residing in the Ukrainian regions bordering Romania) buy such products very rarely. Yet, the experts expressed their concerns that the two countries do not sufficiently use the available potential for mutual trade.

”

If we look at the trade turnover, this is small for two neighbouring countries [...]. It is difficult to speak about the reasons for this. This might be the security situation, and therefore there are no investments [...]. It is very common to hear criticism that the economic exchanges [between Ukraine and Romania] are lagging behind. But on the other hand, if you look at the top 5 countries with which Ukraine is trading, these countries are much more economically developed than Romania.

Sergiy Gerasymchuk

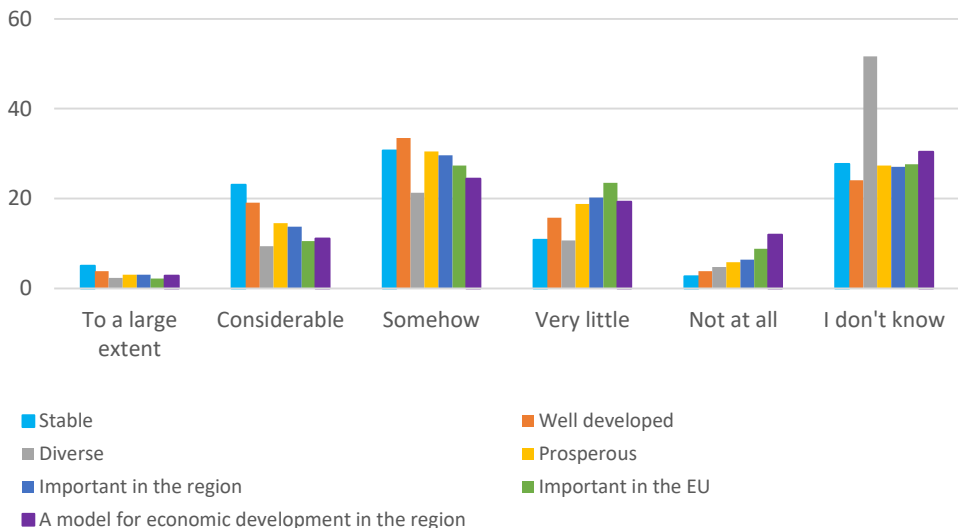
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I did not encounter any structured systematic study that would allow us to say what we [Ukraine and Romania] could jointly produce. Well, we trade, there is a trade turnover, but is that enough?

Yaroslav Matiychuk

At the societal level, the high non-response rate (Figure 1) in the survey* shows that Ukrainians generally appear to know little about the Romanian economy. Thus, they do not assess Romania's economy high enough in terms of development, stability, diversity, prosperity and ability to play an active role in the region. Romania is not perceived as a possible model for economic development either (Figure 1). However, Ukrainians tend to rank high the importance of having a solid economic cooperation of Ukraine with Romania (47.2% of respondents believe this cooperation is important or very important).

Figure 1. Do you consider that Romania's economy is stable, well developed, diverse, prosperous, plays an important role in the region/in the EU, could be a model for economic development for the other countries in the region? %



At the expert level, Romania's economy was generally rated moderately, whilst acknowledging its growing potential. However, as indicated by the experts, Romania still lags behind other EU countries in the region and does not always make sufficient use of its potential to be more visible. This could be justified by the competitive environment in the region. The level of the economic cooperation between Ukraine and Romania was not highly evaluated either. Romania is seen not sufficiently interested in developing closer economic ties with Ukraine. According to the experts, economic dialogue with Ukraine is not currently a priority

* A high non-response rate (usually around 30%) was observed during the survey in Ukraine not only in the block of questions related to the economic factor, but for all the questions related to respondents' awareness of neighbouring Romania, regardless of the topic raised.

for Romania which benefits mostly from the current ties with the West. Moreover, when questioned about Romania's economic potential to exert actorness in the region, this is seen neither as Romania's priority, nor as an objective. The majority of experts argue that we can speak of Romanian economic actorness in the region only when Romania reaches a higher level of the economic development and is able to initiate regional economic initiatives.

”

They [Romanians] calculate their priorities, they consider what brings them more advantages and opportunities [...]. For them it is more profitable to work with the countries of the West because they are recipients there. They are more interested in working with those who give money rather than to give money themselves. Their priorities now are different. When they really reach a good level and are able to compete at least with Poland, then we can speak about some regional economic initiatives led by Romania. But now they have completely different objectives.

Serhii Bostan

”

Romania has no particular economic interest vis-à-vis Ukraine [...]. I do not see the bilateral trade to be very visible. Romania can do well without trade with Ukraine. So is Ukraine.

Sergiy Fedunyak

1.3. Military capabilities

Throughout the official discourse of Ukraine, a common interest in regional stability and security is present. Thus, the military cooperation with Romania, a member of the Euro-Atlantic structures, is perceived of great significance¹⁸. In Ukraine, the military-technical assistance received from Romania and Bucharest's contribution to the workings of the Ukraine-NATO Trust Fund on Cybersecurity is highly appreciated¹⁹. Concurrently, 40% of Ukrainians believe or somewhat believe that Romania should have offered more assistance to support their country against Russian aggression. As shown by the survey data, the military cooperation between Ukraine and Romania is desirable for 31.3% and somewhat desirable for 25.6% of the respondents.

At the expert level, the military capacity of Romania is assessed primarily via Romania's membership in NATO which guarantees high standards in the defence sector. Overall, Romania's NATO membership was the main reference point when discussing Romania's military capacity. Romania *per se* is not perceived as a security guarantor in the region, given the presence of other major actors, for instance, Turkey in the Black Sea or Poland in relation to the Eastern Partnership area. However, Romania is considered an important actor, since through its NATO membership it can persuade its allies to pay particular attention to the stability and security of the eastern flank of the transatlantic community. Similar to the findings

from the official discourse, Romania's current assistance to Ukraine is indicated as important and is highly appreciated at the expert level.

”

Thanks to the membership in the Euro-Atlantic organizations [...], Romania is a bit readier, in case the situation is getting more complicated, to back Ukraine up in a potential dialogue with Russia on Black Sea issues.

Oleksii Poltorakov

”

The very fact that Romania is a NATO member indicates that the country's military preparedness is in line with NATO standards, meaning the highest standards. How can a NATO member-state position itself militarily? Confidently. [...] Romania was in the group of countries that provided military assistance to Ukraine. Romanian instructors participated in the training of the Ukrainian military. Romania plays a role, but again in the context of NATO's policy.

Serhii Bostan

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It is not possible not to have military cooperation [between Ukraine and Romania], since both Bucharest and Kyiv understand that wherever we look, it ends with one thing – the Russian threat over the whole Europe [...].

Yaroslav Matiychuk

Outside NATO's framework, the experts consider Romania can exercise limited impact on regional security matters. Although Romania's defence budget has been recently devoted more resources, it is still considered modest to propel Romania into a regional security provider. Likewise, there is little knowledge of any military cooperation formats existing between Ukraine and Romania outside NATO's umbrella.

”

Considering its NATO membership, I think Romania can be a contributor to security in the region, only if it acts together with other NATO states in the region. Individually, I think, it is not capable yet.

Yevhen Mahda

”

[...] military expenditures in Romania are not significant. Even though the military budget of Romania has increased over recent years, it still remains small enough to influence anything.

Mykola Kapitonenko

”

Romania focuses, of course, on the North Atlantic Alliance, more on military integration within NATO and on relations with the USA. Here the relations [with Ukraine in the military field] go more through NATO than bilaterally.

Sergiy Fedunyak

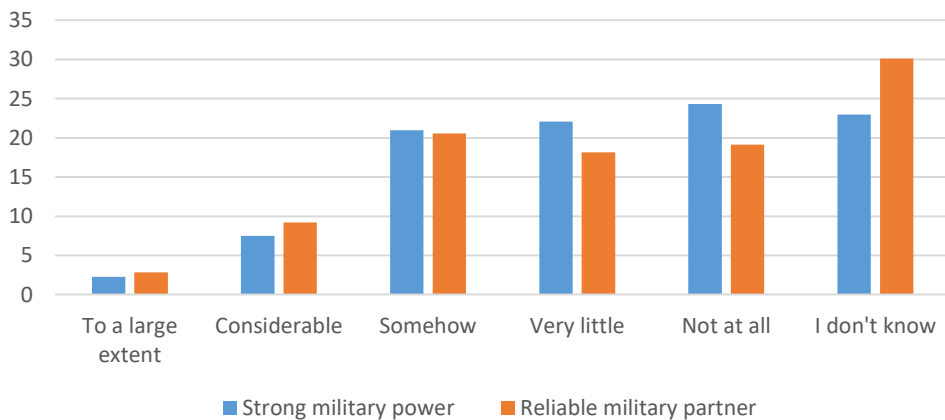
”

However, for the time being, Romania is not a country that, in military terms, could be a leader in the region, not even an agenda-maker.

Serhii Bostan

At the societal level, the number of those who consider or somewhat consider Romania to be a strong military power reached only 9.8%, while 21% of Ukrainians assess Romania somewhat powerful in terms of military capabilities. Almost one third of respondents think that Romania is a reliable or somewhat reliable partner in security-related matters (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Do you consider that Romania is a strong military power / a reliable military partner? %



1.4. Historical experience and culture

In the history and culture spheres, two main challenges were identified which had so far impacted the bilateral dialogue between Ukraine and Romania.

The first one concerns territorial issues. Since Ukraine's independence in 1991 until the 1997 Treaty of Good-Neighbourly Relations and Cooperation was signed, Romania had been dragging the process of recognizing Ukraine's borders. This move seriously affected the bilateral relations. Another territorial 'bone of contention' revolved around the Snake (Serpent) Island and referred to the delimitation of continental shelf in the Black Sea. Eventually, this dispute required the involvement of the International Court of Justice to be settled. Similarly, the Danube-Black Sea Channel aimed at creating a deep waterway in the Ukrainian part of the delta was also indicated among the past sensitive issues²⁰.

The second challenge generating misunderstandings between the Ukrainian and Romanian sides is linked to the minority rights. The latest event, which generated

controversy between the two countries, occurred in September 2017 when the 'Law on Education' with its 'Article 7' on the language of education was adopted in Ukraine. Romania expressed concern over the language provisions of Article 7, seen as an attempt to weaken the rights of ethnic Romanians²¹. However, compared to the tough statements criticizing the 'language article' in the Law made by Hungary*, Romania's reaction is perceived in Ukraine as rather moderate and much more dialogue-oriented.

” *There are some problems related to national minorities and language, but unlike Hungary, Romania does not block Ukraine's path to the EU or NATO.*

Serhii Hakman

” *I do not observe any hostile perception of Romania. Let's be honest, this is Hungary that has taken the most hostile position on this issue.*

Yevhen Mahda

” *[...] compared to Hungary, this communication around the 'language article' was much easier.*

Serhii Bostan

” *Romania is lucky because there is Hungary. Accordingly, the Hungarian sharp position makes Romanian one rather favourable. Romanians have not stopped contacts; they are blocking neither the Euro- nor the Euro-Atlantic direction [...].*

Sergiy Gerasymchuk

” *Since Romania had not been the only country to disagree with the implementation [of Article 7], I do not think that this matter influenced significantly the bilateral relations, especially when comparing it with Hungary [...] that impedes [Ukraine's] full cooperation with NATO [...]. Romania's reaction was softer [...] and did not have a significant negative impact on Romania's perception in Ukraine.*

Natalya Belitser

Apart from the territorial issues and minority rights, other thorny matters, such as the issuing of Romanian passports to Ukrainian citizens**, Romania's participation in World War II on the German side, the situation with the Kryvyi Rih Mining Camp and Processing Works were sporadically indicated as problematic by the experts.

* After the Law on Education was adopted in Ukraine, Péter Szijjártó, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, declared that Hungary would 'block' Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. See, for instance, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 19, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3n4h9aL>.

** The Constitution of Ukraine does not recognize double citizenship in Ukraine, while in Romania the 1991 Law on Romanian Citizenship acknowledges that Romanian citizens have the right to hold dual citizenship.

Yet, these issues, which occasionally emerge in the public discourse or mass-media, are mostly seen as politicized attempts to gain voters' support by inflaming bilateral relations particularly during electoral campaigns. Interestingly, at the societal level, 16.5% of respondents consider or somewhat consider territorial issues to be problematic in the bilateral dialogue between Ukraine and Romania. Moreover, only 9.6% of Ukrainians see or somewhat see minority issues as problematic. According to the experts, these 'sensitive' topics are brought to the fore mostly by the media coverage.

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Some unpleasant moments happened in the history of the bilateral relations, but they were situational and, as a rule, appeared during the electoral campaigns and were used exclusively either by certain political or by marginal civic organizations which were trying to gain some points.

Serhii Bostan

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Territorial problems appear not at the level of the states, but at the level of certain political forces, especially during electoral campaigns [...]. There are many stereotypes, especially among people with low levels of education [...]. Certain statements are made for a certain part of the electorate to please it, while, at the same time, these statements damage the rest of the population, which [...] in turn also damages interstate relations.

Serhii Hakman

”

Unfortunately, our media does not present an interesting, objective, accurate picture. We [Ukraine and Romania] do not really have serious problems. The absence of serious problems in the public sphere shows the potential of the relations [...]. But we have very little interpersonal contacts...

Yevhen Mahda

This might also explain some existing stereotypes at the societal level²². Such stereotypes are indicated in the survey results when respondents were asked to mention the first word association which comes to their mind when hearing 'Romania'. While 16.3% of respondents mentioned the word 'country'/'EU country' in various phrasings, with 11.9% portraying Romania as a 'neighbour/neighbouring country', 11.7% of respondents think of Roma people (often expressed as 'gypsies'). Other frequent stereotyping associations include words such as Dracula, vampires, shoes and furniture^{**}, and poverty^{***}.

* The question was open-ended.

** Shoes and furniture produced in Romania were very popular during Soviet times in Ukraine, which is likely the reason why these associations are mostly shared by elder people.

*** There are also associations related to geography (Bucharest, Transylvania, Black Sea, Danube, and the Carpathian Mountains) or to history and past territorial disputes (such as, World War II, the occupation of Odessa, Snake Island, Ceaușescu).

In general, Romanian culture is very little known in Ukraine. Compared with the other neighbouring countries, cooperation with Romania in the cultural field is characterized as one of the least developed, since Romania does not target the wider Ukrainian society, but rather limits its cultural initiatives to the border regions where most of the Romanian minority is located. Thus, the cultural dialogue seems to be largely sporadic, lacking strong institutional framework and strategic view.

”

I must say that this [cultural dimension] is probably one of the least developed vectors of cooperation between Ukraine and the neighbouring countries. Compared to Poland, it is a completely, radically different experience. In Polish-Ukrainian cultural relations, cooperation is established, there are ongoing institutional links, while interest from both sides exists. And this is constantly increasing [...]. With regard to Romania, links are very sporadic, very irregular, there is no sustainable cooperation, and in general we know very little about each other's culture [...]. I guess Ukrainian culture in Romania is even less known than we [Ukrainians] know about Romanian culture. It is actually not enough, especially since we are neighbours and have a lot of interesting things to share [...]. The existing initiatives are neither sustainable, nor developed. They look more as experience, an injection, a discovery of something, rather than as sustainable cooperation.

Tetyana Filevska

”

In my opinion, we [Ukraine and Romania] do have a sufficient level of cultural cooperation [...]. Compared to the number of cultural exchanges, events, exhibitions, film festivals, etc. [Ukraine has] with Poland, with Romania we [Ukrainians] have several times less [...]. There are many directions where we [Ukraine and Romania] can and should increase cultural exchanges and cooperation which are currently lacking.

Natalya Belitser

”

Very rarely one can find a Romanian concert in Ukraine and a Ukrainian concert in Romania, not for the minority, but for the broader public. We are afraid to go beyond our comfort zone. We [Ukrainians] must learn to bring Ukrainian culture not only to the Ukrainians living in Romania, but also to the Romanians living in Romania, as well as to perceive Romanian culture here [in Ukraine] not only at the level of the national minority.

Serhii Hakman

”

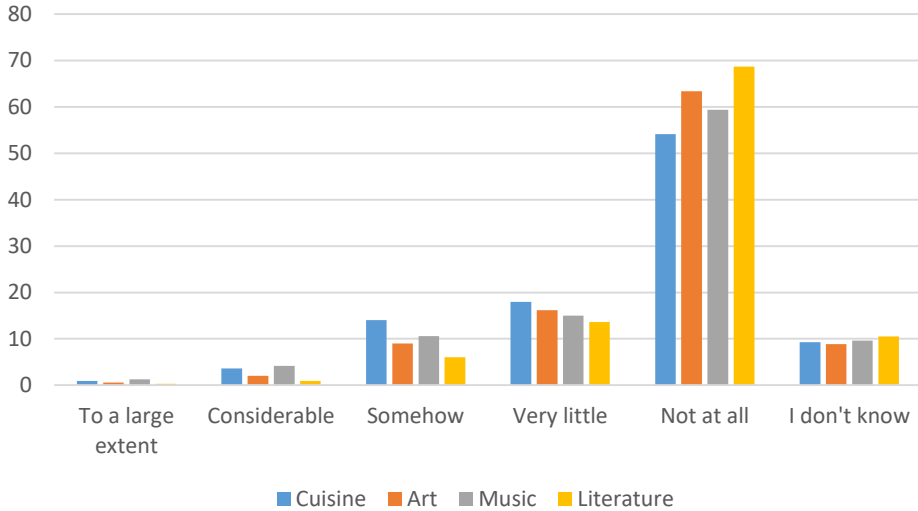
Romania, as a country, is mostly interesting for the Ukrainian borderland, since these [borderland] regions have historically cooperated in cultural and economic fields. Romania is absent in the media context [of Ukraine]. [...]. Most [Ukrainians] know about Romania only by crossing Romania on their way to the seaside in Bulgaria.

Yevhen Mahda

As a result, only around 5% of overall population of Ukraine is well aware of Romanian culture, mainly cuisine, art, music and literature (Figure 3). Yet, as shown by the survey data, these results are higher in those regions bordering Romania. For instance, in Chernivtsi region the level of awareness of Romanian culture is much higher, particularly with respect to music and cuisine. 36.2% of the respondents from Chernivtsi region, regardless of their ethnic background,

indicated they are aware of Romanian music and 31.9% reported they are familiar with the Romanian cuisine. However, Romanian art (8.5%) and literature (8.5%) are barely known even there.

Figure 3. How well do you know Romanian cuisine, art, music, literature? %



1.5. Domestic institutional capacity and expertise

When assessing Romania’s domestic institutional capacity, the country’s main success story appears to be the fight against corruption. The experts admit that Romania’s recent efforts to combat corruption and Bucharest’s newly acquired experience in this regard are perceived in Ukraine as positive examples. References to Romania’s experience in fighting corruption are to be found in the 2017 Analytical Report to the Annual Address of the President of Ukraine to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine²³. Moreover, Laura Codruța Kövesi, currently the head of European Public Prosecutor’s Office and the former chief of Romania’s National Anticorruption Directorate, is seen as a champion of the anti-corruption fight, whose achievements are very much admired in Ukraine.

”

The process and experience of fighting corruption in Romania is very important, and it is important to foster cooperation [of Ukraine with Romania in this domain], since both countries seem to have very similar priorities in this regard [...]. This is one of the common problems.

Natalya Belitsker

”

One of the biggest success stories of Romania is the country's record in the fighting corruption. Romania is not one of the least corrupt countries in Europe, but it is one of the countries with the highest success rates of fighting corruption, and they [Romanians] have had the same starting point as we do.

Serhii Hakman

”

The fight against corruption is relevant for the two countries. In Romania, systemic changes may not have happened yet, but Laura Codruța Kövesi has become a symbol, a legend, often idealized in our country [...]. In Ukraine it is seen as a success story [...].

Sergiy Gerasymchuk

”

Romania has made quite significant progress in the fight against corruption. Ukraine can borrow this experience: the mechanisms used in fighting corruption. It is important that in Romania, unlike in Ukraine, some high officials got imprisoned, while we [Ukrainians] have not reached this level yet. There [in Romania] this has already happened.

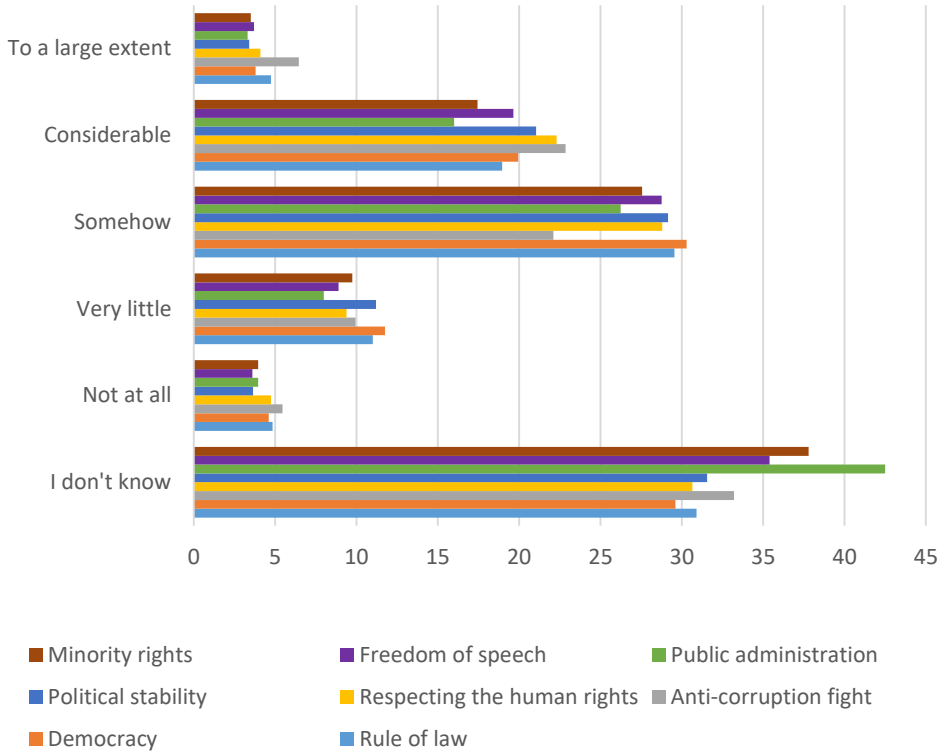
Sergiy Fedunyak

As shown by the survey data, 53.1% of Ukrainians consider that in fighting corruption their own country is somewhat or significantly worse compared to Romania, whereas the number of those respondents who believe that Romania could be considered an anti-corruption model for other countries in the region is lower and constitutes 29.4%. Overall, when asked whether Romania could be regarded as a positive example for the other countries in the region in various fields (such as, democracy, rule of law, human rights, political stability etc.), the positive answers among respondents in Ukraine varied between 19.3-29% (Figure 4).

In addition, Romania's transition from an authoritarian regime to a market economy, the country's achievement in complying with the NATO/EU standards, the use of a single state language were indicated by the experts as successful and important to be considered by Ukraine.

Finally, the majority of experts positively assessed Romania's diplomacy and the country's foreign policy which has remained constantly pro-Western, regardless of the changes in the country's leadership. According to the experts, after the fall of the communist regime, Romania's diplomatic traditions and diplomatic skills were restored and since then Romania has constantly enhanced its diplomatic expertise.

Figure 4. Do you think Romania could be considered a positive example for other countries in the region in the following: rule of law, democracy, fight against corruption, human rights, political stability, administrative capacity, freedom of speech, policy towards minorities? (%)



” Among the neighbouring countries Romania is defined by a professional diplomacy. The Romanian diplomatic school has always been at a very high level. And [Romania has] continuity in its foreign policy [...]. There are no significant fluctuations. Foreign policy has become stable [...]. Not like in Ukraine, where each time a new government was installed, we [Ukrainians] did not know whether there would be a turn to the West or to Russia.

Serhiy Gerasymchuk

” Romania's foreign policy has always been at a very high level [...]. Romania is a country with strong and professional diplomacy.

Serhii Bostan

” *Romania has strong diplomacy, good intelligence, fairly balanced assessment of the situation, persistent preoccupation with achieving its goals. The power vertical is good in that.*

Andrii Veselovskyi

” *There is an old diplomatic tradition in Romania [...]. Romanian diplomacy is very experienced, they [Romanians] have their own diplomatic tradition which was not completely affected during the communist rule. [...]. Traditions have been restored, diplomatic skills and contacts have been restored. They use their capabilities quite efficiently and know the limits their own state, their army and economy have. They understand how united and stable their society is [...].*

Yaroslav Matiychyk

” *[...] The foreign policy expertise [of Romania] is at a very high level [...]. Even in the communist time Romania did not significantly loose this level. And after 1990 Romania has only added quality to its diplomacy.*

Sergiy Fedunyak

” *Romania's position in the region looks good, that can be a result of well-thought approaches towards foreign policy.*

Mykola Kapitonenko

1.6. Membership in international organizations

Romania was the first state to ratify the Association Agreement between Ukraine and EU, which, according to the former president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, ‘will be forever written down in the history of the Ukrainian-Romanian relations. This also reflects Romania’s attitude towards the European perspective, the perspective of Ukraine’s membership in the European Union’²⁴. Thus, Romania is seen as the country that could become a ‘bridge’ between Ukraine and the EU²⁵.

Romania’s membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures is generally perceived in Ukraine as the main incentive for the country’s progress. For instance, 44.5% of Ukrainians believe or somewhat believe that the EU membership has positively contributed to Romania’s development. 39.7% of respondents consider or somewhat consider that Romania’s membership in NATO positively impacted the country’s security. However, only 24.3% and 22.2% of the Ukrainians perceive or somewhat Romania as a model for the integration into the EU and, respectively, into NATO.

Concurrently, as shown by the survey results, a rather moderate assessment of Romania’s capacity to advocate the interests of the region in the EU and NATO was indicated by the population. The number of those positively or somewhat positively assessing Romania’s capacity to represent the interests of the region in the EU was 24.3%, while in NATO – 22.1%.

Romania's role in the international organizations (namely, in the EU and NATO) is ranked as moderate by Ukrainians, given the complexity and competitive environment existing in the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea regions. There are two main reasons for this result, according to the experts. First, other ambitious state actors are present in these regions, whose leadership capacities are more solid and better cemented than those of Romania (with reference mainly to Poland and Turkey). Second, the economic and military weight of Romania, despite its recent advancements, is still lagging behind other region actors. With the EU and NATO support, Romania's regional potential has been growing, however, in order to play a visible role in the regional affairs, strong political determination is also required at the level of the Romanian foreign policy establishment. Meanwhile, Romania could become more visible in the sectoral cooperation with other countries from the region (including non-EU/NATO states), in fields such as cybersecurity and/or energy.

”

In our context, the Black Sea context, we have the largest state in the region – the Russian Federation, the second large state – Turkey [...]. And then we have two more states, also notable with resources and ambitions – Ukraine and Romania [...]. Romania is the only country here that is both a NATO and EU member. In addition, it has the support of large European countries and also of the United States [...]. Therefore, Romania has obtained a serious role, despite its lower human and economic potential. Can this be called leadership?

Andrii Veselovskyi

”

The Eastern Partnership is a complicated topic, since it is a very heterogeneous project. In order to maintain it atop, the political determination is needed in Brussels, which depends on Berlin and Paris, but not on Bucharest. Donor opportunities are also needed, which Berlin, Paris or Stockholm can afford, but not Bucharest. [...]. It is clear that Romania has an ambition to play a role in this region, although Poland is the engine there [...]. In the Black Sea region, we have Turkey that has an enormous influence and naval power.

Sergiy Gerasymchuk

”

In the Black Sea Romania is not a key NATO member-state, especially since there is Turkey there.

Oleksii Poltorakov

”

When we speak globally about the region, Romania ranks lower than Turkey, Poland [...].

Serhii Bostan

”

The security system in the Black Sea region is weak [...]. The threat has increased for all the countries in the region [...] The role of Romania is not a key one, since the security profile of the region is primarily defined by Russia, Turkey and the relations between them. However, as a NATO member, Romania can influence the security situation, the regional via the initiatives within the framework of the alliance.

Mykola Kapitonenko

At the expert level, both multilateral (via the institutional set-up provided by the EU and NATO) and bilateral formats of cooperation with Romania are seen as important for Ukraine. In fact, the two formats are intertwined, according to the experts. When bilateral cooperation functions properly, the multilateral format of cooperation has only to gain.

”

For Ukraine the priority is the security of the Black Sea region. Romanian and Polish capacities are not sufficient for this. Here it is worth relying more on cooperation with NATO than solely on cooperation with Romania [...]. But things are linked to one another [...]. If there is a proper bilateral cooperation, then the multilateral format will also have to gain.

Sergiy Gerasymchuk

”

I do not think that they can be split, they [the bilateral and multilateral formats of cooperation] match very well. Improving bilateral relations could be a move [of Ukraine] towards the EU and NATO integration. Therefore, these formats do not contradict each other, moreover, they reinforce each other, since there is a common goal and a common way

Natalya Belitser

”

We cannot get away from the EU and NATO frameworks. We have and will definitely have this context. We must have both. But very important is also the intensity of the institutional development at the bilateral level.

Sergiy Fedunyak

”

We cannot look at them detached [...]. Because the 'Ukraine – Romania' dialogue is about Ukraine's relations with the EU and NATO member-state. We have to enhance the dialogue, which is difficult outside the EU and NATO frameworks, because this is the context that will always accompany these relations.

Serhii Bostan

”

We have to strengthen the bilateral relations with Romania as much as possible, trying to solve those ambiguous moments which we have in our relations. Since Romania understands that its significance for the region does not allow it to lead the process or to set the agenda, it prefers multilateral frameworks. In this regard, there is an absolute solidarity between Romania and Poland, and we [Ukraine] should strive to be the third element in this construction.

Andrii Veselovskyi

Overall, according to the findings in Ukraine, the EU and NATO memberships are founding elements of Romania's actorness in the international arena, which means that Bucharest's capacity to wield an efficient foreign policy depends to a large extent on these international organizations/institutions to compensate for its external limitations.

**2. ROMANIA'S ACTORNESS IN ITS EASTERN VICINITY:
EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF
MOLDOVA**

2.1. Size (surface and population) and geographic location

In the Republic of Moldova, Romania's size and geographic location are largely associated with the country's access to natural resources and the Black Sea, whereas the country's significant population translates into human resources. Size- and population-wise, the experts in the Republic of Moldova perceive Romania as important enough to play a role in the region. However, the experts highlight that in spite of the relevant size, available natural resources and population, these assets are currently untapped.

”

Probably, in an objective way, Romania is a country that could belong to the group of states of a bigger size, considering also the long existence of the state, the level of development, [...] and the image at the international level.

Viorel Chivriga

”

Romania is practically the only country in the region, except for Turkey, which has access to gas and oil resources.

Iulian Groza

”

Romania has capabilities, especially resources, geographic location, although these assets are not adequately exploited.

Octavian Țicu

”

Romania is a medium-sized country in which there are many unexplored, untapped and unexploited advantages.

Igor Munteanu

Similarly, Romania is perceived as a large county at the societal level: 73.8% of respondents consider or somewhat consider Romania to be a large country surface- and 69.1% population-wise. This perception resides in the fact that the Republic of Moldova is objectively smaller than Romania; therefore, the perceptions of Romania's size, territory and population are likely assessed in comparative terms.

Furthermore, 57.3% of Moldovans consider or somewhat consider that Romania's size and geographic location allow the country to play a more influential role in its eastern vicinity. In spite of the aforementioned assessment, Romania's ability to exert influence in the region appears to be obstructed by external factors. While the general perception is that Romania's geographic positioning is advantageous or somewhat advantageous for the country (77.8% of the Moldovan population), the experts highlight the challenges existing within the region. As such, the geopolitical location in which the country is situated is defined as rather problematic, with an array of regional security complexes that induces additional pressure and costs.

”

All Eastern Europe is an area of a permanent conflict [...]. Romania's geographic location is far from being a gift from God; it is rather an area of vulnerabilities where you have to spend more on security and stability than in other regions.

Igor Munteanu

”

Romania is in an area packed with frozen or active conflicts, including Ukraine.

Anatol Şalaru

Moreover, the experts highlight that there are other important actors in the region, such as Turkey or the Russian Federation, who are directly interested in influencing the regional developments. Therefore, Romania's capacity to become an important actor at the regional level hinges very much on its diplomatic ability to interact with the aforementioned two states. In addition, Poland and Ukraine are also seen as influential in the region.

”

There are other actors in this region who are financing many processes, whether it is Turkey or the Russian Federation. Romania's ability to become a regional leader is very much directly proportional to Romania's ability to interact with these two forces.

Iulian Groza

”

Ukraine, even if there is a war on its territory and they [Ukrainians] are in demographic decline, is much more attractive [than Romania] in terms of investments, [...], while Ukraine's surface is a strategic and geo-economic asset.

Igor Munteanu

”

If Romania were a politically credible country, if it were treated as such by Ukraine in particular, it could probably have been a regional leader.

Iulian Frunţaşu

”

Romania must understand that in the east there is another big state [Ukraine], bigger than Romania which, with all the difficulties it has now, [...], is a state that, [...] in the near future, will become an economic power in the region; it is a state that has resources, strong industries, a double population compared to Romania and that is quite fast in the economic expansion.

Viorel Chivriga

2.2. Economic weight

Romania is being perceived as the most important economic partner of the Republic of Moldova. Over the past decade, Romania has managed to outrun Russia and since 2014, when the Republic of Moldova signed the Association Agreement with the EU, Romania has become the Republic of Moldova's most important

trading partner.* The overall economic cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova is currently intense, with various channels of cooperation on both sides²⁶. Joint projects are underway (many of them funded by the Romanian government) which further consolidate the bilateral relationship (see, for instance, the activities carried out by SMURD** in the Republic of Moldova, Iași-Ungheni-Chișinău gas pipeline, restoration of Stânca-Costești Hydropower plant, etc.). Moreover, Romania is directly offering financial assistance and support to its neighbour, in the form of both public and private investments, financial aids and non-reimbursable grants aimed at reaching the business community in the Republic of Moldova or at advancing large infrastructure projects (from the rehabilitation of cultural sites monuments, schools and kindergartens, to over annual 5000 scholarships to students in Moldova***, etc.).

Romania's economic capacity is overall positively perceived by the population of the Republic of Moldova. According to the survey data, Moldovans perceive or somewhat perceive Romania's economy as developed (47%), diverse (47.2%), prosperous (46.9%) that plays an important economic role at the regional level (46.8%). Furthermore, Romania's model of economic development appears to be attractive, considering that 48.9% of the Moldovan population believe or somewhat believe that Romania could be a model for economic development for other countries in the region (Figure 5).

Most Moldovan citizens assess highly the role of Romanian investments in the Republic of Moldova – 70.3% of respondents find them very important or important. The economic cooperation of the Republic of Moldova with Romania is evaluated similarly high – it is considered as very important or important by 68.2% of respondents. However, in the experts' opinion, Romania has shown a rather limited capacity to influence the Republic of Moldova's agenda economically. In spite of the current economic partnership, Romania seems not sufficiently able to translate the economic leverage into political influence. Such observation has been recurrent among the experts who perceive and acknowledge Romania as being the most important economic partner of the Republic of Moldova, but whose potential is poorly exploited. The experts seem also to disagree with the way Romania has so far provided support to the Republic of Moldova, especially when it comes to the sectors/areas in which Romania chose to provide financial assistance. Moreover, in

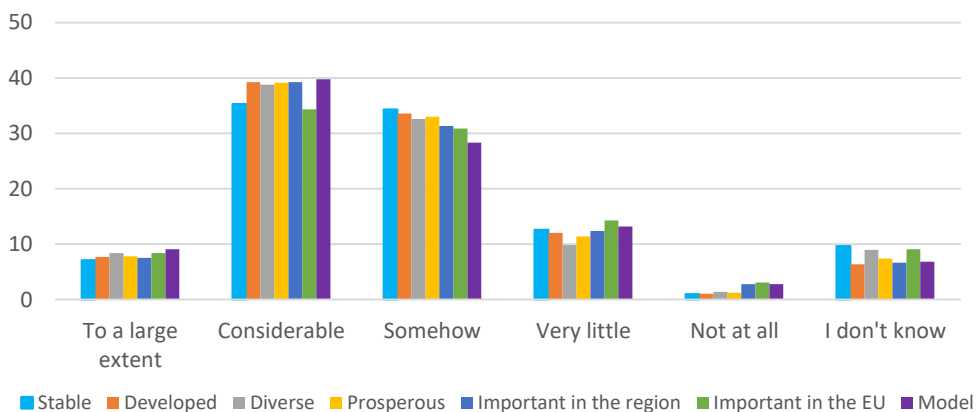
* In 2014, Romania exceeded Russia and became the most important commercial partner of the Republic of Moldova, with 1.23 milliard USD, according to Moldovan National Bureau of Statistics, <https://bit.ly/32pMBs9>, <https://bit.ly/2U6f3dQ>.

** SMURD is Romania's emergency rescue service, which since 2014 has been operating also in the Republic of Moldova.

*** Since 2012 under the provisions of a Bilateral Agreement between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, Romania has offered more than 5000 scholarships every year to students from the Republic of Moldova. For more details, please see <https://bit.ly/358DSfD>.

practical terms, the limited amount of foreign direct investments originating from Romania and the small number of Romanian companies on the Moldovan market (namely, in strategic fields such as insurances, finances, postal, telecommunication services, energy, etc.) do not seem to support in practice a visible role played by Romania in the economy of the Republic of Moldova. Meanwhile, Russia's direct investments in the economy of the Republic of Moldova are perceived as well targeted at strategic economic sectors.

Figure 5. Do you consider that Romania's economy is stable, well developed, diverse, prosperous, plays an important role in the region/in the EU, could be a model for economic development for the other countries in the region? %



” Romania is a slacker in terms of investments in the Republic of Moldova and is, generally, missing from the Moldovan economic landscape. [...] If we look at the financial portfolio that Romania has invested in the Republic of Moldova, Romania should definitely be very disappointed with the results it has obtained so far in the political life [of the Republic of Moldova]. According to some estimations, about \$1 billion has been invested here. The question is to what extent have these investment priorities been chosen correctly? Making schools or kindergartens in villages and towns with dramatic, galloping demographic decline is at least a bizarre investment.

Igor Munteanu

” Romania has a weak vision regarding the Republic of Moldova. [...] If you compare 2008 and 2016 with respect to the volume of FDI in the Republic of Moldova, you will receive a catastrophic figure of condemnation of Romania. While Romania invests public money to transform the Republic of Moldova, Romanian investments in the Republic of Moldova decrease, and Russian investments increase. [...] Another important aspect refers to the presence of Romanian companies in the Republic of Moldova and here the situation is catastrophic.

Veaceslav Ioniță

”

So far, I have not seen any roadmaps, which show the measures to be taken by both parties, at the national level, by the state, by the institutions, but also by the actors who are quite important, from the business community – representatives of both Romanian and Moldovan business.

Viorel Chivriga

”

Romania offered 100 million in grants to the Republic of Moldova. Thank you. But what was this money for? It was a waste of money, because if Romania wants to play a role, it does not have to give ‘alms’ to a poor brother. This is a wrong approach. [...]. The political establishment in Bucharest does not understand that the Republic of Moldova should not be helped financially, but it should be helped with the so-called ‘smart money’, which could transform Moldova into a European country.

Veaceslav Ioniță

”

It is very important to invest in kindergartens, but at the same time, you neglect other important aspects and you will probably lose the informational war with Russia.

Anatol Țăranu

”

Hypothetically, if I were a decision maker in charge of spending Romanian money in the Republic of Moldova, I think I would have invested in projects with high visibility and impact, like a strategic national road or a bridge [...]. The goal is to reach the general population and gain their support.

Ilian Cașu

2.3. Military capabilities

The official discourse of the Republic of Moldova depicts the Moldovan – Romanian relationship in the field of defence and security as constant, efficient and generally pragmatic, with extended cooperation in several fields: from staff exchanges to joint military exercises and training²⁷. It also revolves around acknowledging and appreciating Romania’s constant support for the development of the Moldovan military sector²⁸. As such, Romania proves to be pro-active in supporting the modernization of the Moldovan army via donations, transfer of know-how and joint projects.

This approach is also shared by the experts who consider Romania as an important security and military actor in the region. Moreover, they acknowledge Romania’s interest and active role in strengthening the military cooperation with the Republic of Moldova and perceive Romania as an example for how the Moldovan army should be modernized.

”

Romania can be considered an example for the Republic of Moldova [...] in the way in which the Romanian army was organized, in the way in which Romania knew how to keep up with the NATO standards. [...] Romania has done a lot, we had a very good collaboration [...], but our people fail to keep up with the proposals that come from Romania.

Anatol Țăranu

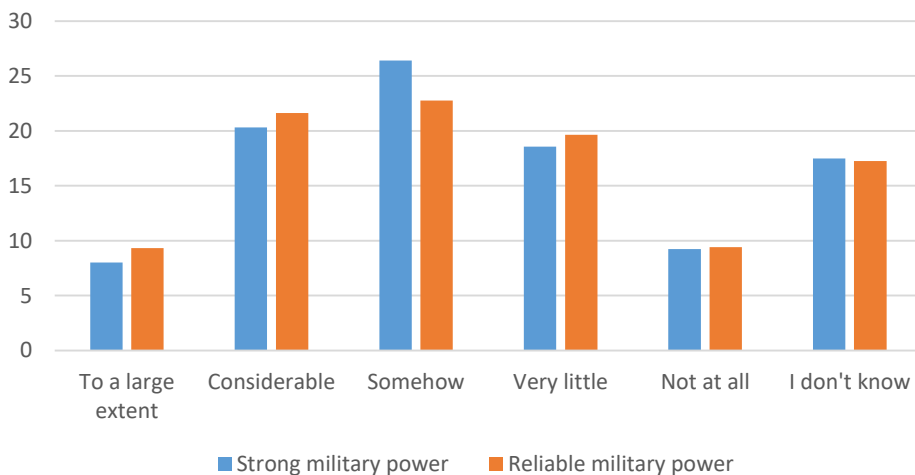
”

I think that Romania is a factor of stability [...]. A stable, prosperous Romania is the best factor of stability for the Republic of Moldova.

Iurie Reniță

However, at the societal level, the perception of Romania's military capacity is not that high – Romania is seen as a very strong or considerably strong military power in the region by 28.3% of population. 30.9% of respondents find it to be a very reliable or considerably reliable military partner (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Do you consider that Romania is a strong military power / a reliable military partner? %



Furthermore, when assessing the military dimension of Moldovan – Romanian relations, most experts highlight the importance of Romania's membership in the international organizations. Mainly, the participation in NATO is seen as the one significantly strengthening Romania's capabilities, credibility and military expertise. In fact, the experts point out that in defence- and security-related matters Romania's actorness depends entirely on NATO's security umbrella and on the partnership with the U.S. In this regard, Romania is perceived as an important NATO

member and a strategic partner of the U.S. in the region with a solid expertise and capabilities, which contribute to strengthening regional security. The expert community from the Republic of Moldova expects Romania to further contribute to the security and stability of the Republic of Moldova. Yet, the experts acknowledge that the level of cooperation in the security and defence field depends very much on the political elites in power in Chişinău.

” *Romania's enormous advantage is the NATO membership and the strategic partnership with the USA.*

Ion Şişcanu

” *Romania has a special partnership with the USA; there is a kind of delegation of responsibility or attention for Romania and a trust towards Romania in Washington in relation to the region.*

Iulian Groza

” *I believe that Romania is a provider of stability, through its firm position in terms of Euro-Atlantic orientation, its alliance with the USA, which makes any attempt to destabilize this region to collide with this 'wall' – the Romanian-American alliance. In case this alliance did not exist, Romania would have been much more vulnerable, and the regional situation would have been much worse off.*

Anatol Țăranu

” *Romania can provide stability and security only through a solid partnership with the USA.*

Iulian Fruntaşu

” *The Republic of Moldova is an unpredictable country [...]; it changes depending on the government and the parties that come to power [...]. All these fluctuations have led to a situation in which NATO can no longer make a clear plan. The collaboration with the Republic of Moldova, including the collaboration regarding the endowment of the national army, [...] has been stopped, because NATO does not want to prepare an army that will be hostile, it does not want to endow it. I am glad that Romania has not stopped this collaboration and it has always been open.*

Anatol Şalaru

However, from a different perspective, some experts believe that Romania is a 'security-consumer' rather than a 'security-provider' in the region, while Bucharest's membership in the transatlantic organizations has not only determined a backlash from the Russian Federation but, in fact, exposed the Republic of Moldova, which now finds itself between two major geopolitical blocs, the transatlantic community and Russia.

”

At the time being, I believe Romania is not a security provider, but rather a security consumer. The missile-defence shield and the NATO membership represent a factor of stability for Romania; I do not see it visible for the Republic of Moldova. [...]. Romania's entry into NATO was perceived by the Russian Federation as a more direct threat to the influence Moscow holds over the Republic of Moldova [...].

Octavian Țîcu

”

We are in a grey area [between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia]. We would have liked to be under the shield of NATO alliance. And for this reason, the Russians have a more belligerent, a more militaristic behaviour. When there are two big blocs that end up in a cold war, those in between suffer (look at Georgia, Ukraine).

Iulian Frunțașu

Finally, the expert community in the Republic of Moldova underlines the importance of strengthening the bilateral defence cooperation between the two countries. The bilateral approach, according to the experts, would decrease the dependency on the Euro-Atlantic structures, thus rendering irrelevant the divergent approaches of other EU/NATO members states vis-à-vis the Republic of Moldova, which for geopolitical reasons (i.e. the risk of angering Russia) may not want to see an enhanced relation with Chișinău.

”

Romania has never been an independent actor, and this is because Romania is very dedicated and very receptive to the messages coming from other European capitals.

Anatol Țăranu

”

Romania has often been wrong when it collaborated with the Republic of Moldova at the European level, since at the European level not all countries have the same policy towards the Republic of Moldova, towards Ukraine or towards the Russian Federation. That is why Romania should collaborate within NATO, but more bilaterally with the Republic of Moldova.

Anatol Șalaru

The necessity to strengthen the military collaboration between their country and Romania (largely or considerably) was also underpinned by the survey data (48.9%). The military cooperation between the two countries is considered desirable by 47.4% of respondents. In addition, in the eventuality of an armed conflict, 53% of population of the Republic of Moldova would look for Romania's support to their country. Moreover, regarding the Transnistrian dossier, the Moldovan society would welcome more involvement from Romania in safeguarding the Republic of Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mainly involvement at the diplomatic level (44.1%) and more assistance (47.2%).

2.4. Historical experience and culture

Culture and history represent an important dimension of Moldovan – Romanian bilateral relations. The countries' special ties 'based on the historical traditions of common culture'²⁹ are not only outlined in the official discourse, but also acknowledged by the general public. As such, at the societal level, roughly 2/3 of the respondents consider Moldovan culture (74.4%), history (71.9%) and traditions (75.4%) to be very close or close to those of Romania*. In addition, when asked to mention the first word which comes to their mind when hearing 'Romania'^{**}, 'neighbours' (20.3%), 'brothers' (8.9%) and 'friends' (5.5%) were among the most frequent associations.

In spite of the strong cultural ties between the two neighbours, not all the Moldovans are familiar with the Romanian culture; however the share of those who are knowledgeable is rather high (Figure 7). Mainly, Romanian art is largely known or considerably known by 40% of respondents, literature – by 48.8%, cuisine – by 51.3% and music by 62.3%.

Yet, the expert community in the Republic of Moldova highlights Romania's inability to take proper advantage of its soft power, since it acts in a rather timid manner, avoiding overt implication in the Moldovan affairs. Therefore, the future of the bilateral relations seems to depend on how Romania will be able to promote coherent policies in relation to culture and identity in the Republic of Moldova and how active the country will be in supporting and promoting these policies.

”

The kindergarten project is a good example of soft power, but often Romania's actions are not promoted, the information is not disseminated. Romania's behaviour is characterized by 'overmodesty'

Viorel Chivriga

”

[...] much depends on how Bucharest will be able to promote coherent policies in relation to what is called identity policy in the Republic of Moldova. [...] We have the impression as if Bucharest is embarrassed by the policies it promotes in the Republic of Moldova. I believe that Bucharest must follow the example of Budapest, be more incisive in this regard and simply impose itself.

Anatol Țăranu

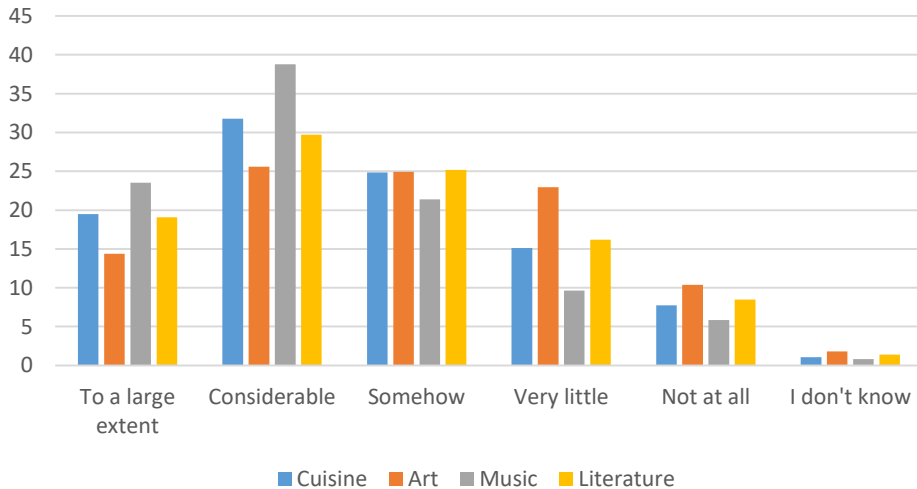
* Those respondents who have indicated their native language (mother tongue) as Romanian perceive much stronger the links between the Republic of Moldova's and Romania's culture (83.2%), history (80.6%) and traditions (83.9%) compared to the respondents who have indicated their native language as Russian or Ukrainian. Those respondents who have indicated their native language (mother tongue) as Russian perceive Moldovan culture (50.3%), history (46.1%) and traditions (51.4%) to be very close or close to those of Romania. Those respondents who have indicated their native language (mother tongue) as Ukrainian perceive Moldovan culture (36.8%), history (34.2%) and traditions (42.1%) to be very close or close to those of Romania.

** The question was open-ended.

” *In the eyes of the decision makers from Bucharest, the east has hyperbolized proportions. There is a fear of everything coming from the east.*

Iulian Fruntașu

Figure 7. How well do you know Romanian cuisine, art, music, literature? (%)



According to this line of thinking, Romania can only enhance its visibility and presence by investing more in the Moldovan mass-media (both in the TV and online segments), especially since the Russian Federation is very present and active on the Moldovan media market. Thus, the main challenge in the Republic of Moldova seems to be the collective mind-set, which is still largely shaped by the Russian information space.

” *We are still within the Russian information space. [...] The ongoing identity war that takes place here, in the Republic of Moldova, every day will never end as long as the information space is dominated by Russia. If Romania wants and intends to obtain tangible results in this area, the Romanian investments must be directed towards the informational space.*

Anatol Țăranu

Romania is not seen assertive in terms of information dissemination with a well thought strategy in this regard, whereas investments in mass-media in the Republic of Moldova should represent a priority for the Romanian foreign policy

establishment. Furthermore, Romania appears to focus chiefly on the Romanian-speaking population of the Republic of Moldova, without reaching out also to the segment of population consisting of Russian-speakers in both Transnistria and Gagauzia.

” [...] it is necessary to support independent press institutions, technical assistance based on needs, which would raise the quality of the news, improve the legal and regulatory environment for the independent press.

Natalia Stercul

” I believe that Romania can do much more in the media field. We have a cooperation project with TVR Moldova and for years I have suggested to try to develop at least a part of the shows that will reach Russian speakers [...], for whom we [TVR Moldova] are not attractive. And I believe that here Romania can do much more, by adapting to the local context. [...] This would boost Romania's image at the societal level beyond the Romanian speakers, a media space which is loaded with different myths and stereotypes promoted by local sources and pro-Russian agents of influence.

Iulian Groza

” It is very important for Romania to allocate money to rebuild, modernize kindergartens, schools, and other cultural buildings in the Republic of Moldova. All these things are absolutely necessary and they will be appreciated over time. But Romania's main problem is that it loses the information war with Russia. And as long as this continues, we cannot talk about a success of the Romanian policies towards the Republic of Moldova. [...] Romania puts money in the walls, while the Russians put them in people's minds. The conclusion is simple: reorient your resources!

Anatol Țăranu

Finally, the interviewed experts disagree on how two of Bucharest's flagship policies have been designed. First, providing academic grants to the Moldovan students has had also adverse effects on the Moldovan human capital, generating a considerable 'brain drain' from the Republic of Moldova to Romania and other EU countries. A better strategy to boost Romania's image and enhance cooperation in the cultural and education sphere would have been the investment in more complex cultural projects, such as universities and bookshops.

” For example, I find [granting the Moldovan students] the possibility to study in Romania flawed, because this absorbs all the Moldovan youth in Romania who no longer return. [...] the best practice would have been to open Romanian universities here.

Octavian Țicu

”

After 1991, the Romanian state decided to give scholarships to students from the Republic of Moldova, but never conditioned these scholarships on the future job-related decisions the graduates would make upon completion the studies. As a result of this one-way policy and in my opinion erroneous, roughly 95% of all the Moldovan graduates of higher education institutions in Romania preferred to stay there [in Romania] or to go to the West. The social body of the Republic of Moldova was completely depleted. Moldovan cities have not been able to regenerate their elites at the rate of demographic exodus. Who benefited from this? [...] Russian-speaking elites who have a higher status than Romanian-speakers.

Igor Munteanu

”

There is a need of bookstores, which [...] should also target the rural environment.

Iurie Reniță

”

Certain branches of some Romanian universities were extended to the Republic of Moldova, but new [Romanian] universities were never opened, libraries or bookstores were never opened. Cărturești [Romanian bookstore] opened last year [2019] in a mall after 30 years.

Igor Munteanu

”

Opening a branch of one of the universities from Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca or Iași in Chișinău would be necessary.

Iulian Groza

Second, according to the experts, the process of granting Romanian citizenship to foreigners who had Romanian ancestors has been inaccurately framed, since the procedure for applying for Romanian citizenship is faulty and is not sufficiently underpinned by rigorous checks.

”

The problem is that here, in the Republic of Moldova, for example in Transnistria, many ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, unaware of the Romanian language, of Romania, go and obtain citizenship.

Anatol Țăranu

”

It must be seen to what extent they [applicants for the Romanian citizenship] share Romanian values, because many people were guided by purely material aspects, being interested only in the Romanian passport and not in sharing Romanian values. [...]. Granting citizenship should be a more complex, more demanding process.

Iurie Reniță

”

Romania did wrong. There were cases when money was made on this subject [meaning, Romanian citizenship], a bad image, [...] which discredited Romania. Some conditions [for acquiring citizenship] had to be set. At least, the language should be known by those who want to obtain Romanian citizenship.

Ion Șișcanu

” *Obtaining citizenship is not a matter of affinity for [Romanian] cultural political history, but it is largely a matter of opportunism for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.*

Octavian Țicu

” *Romanian citizenship is merely a tool to find a job and to travel freely in the EU.*

Ilian Cașu

2.5. Domestic institutional capacity and expertise

Particularly since joining the Euro-Atlantic structures, Romania has been frequently referred to in the Republic of Moldova as a model of democratic reforms, economic performance and rule of law. For instance, Romania's fight against corruption has had strong reverberations. The slogan 'DNA cross the Prut river!'^{*} was often invoked by the civil society in the Republic of Moldova.

” *Romania is a model for the Republic of Moldova that has developed in a spectacular way and has become attractive from several points of view, including the DNA institution and the economic boom at the end of 2008-2010. [...]. The salaries, pensions, way of life, economic prosperity, institutional stability, the fight against corruption are the most important factors.*

Octavian Țicu

” *Romania can be a positive model of institutional stability, of reforms for the Republic of Moldova, because Romania has experience, and can be an example of good practices in the field of anti-corruption both for the Republic of Moldova and for Ukraine, or other states in the area.*

Natalia Stercul

” *Regarding the institutional capacity, Romania has institutions and structures [...] that work, exist and can be transposed to the Republic of Moldova.*

Veaceslav Ioniță

” *Romania has a much greater public administration experience than we have [in the Republic of Moldova].*

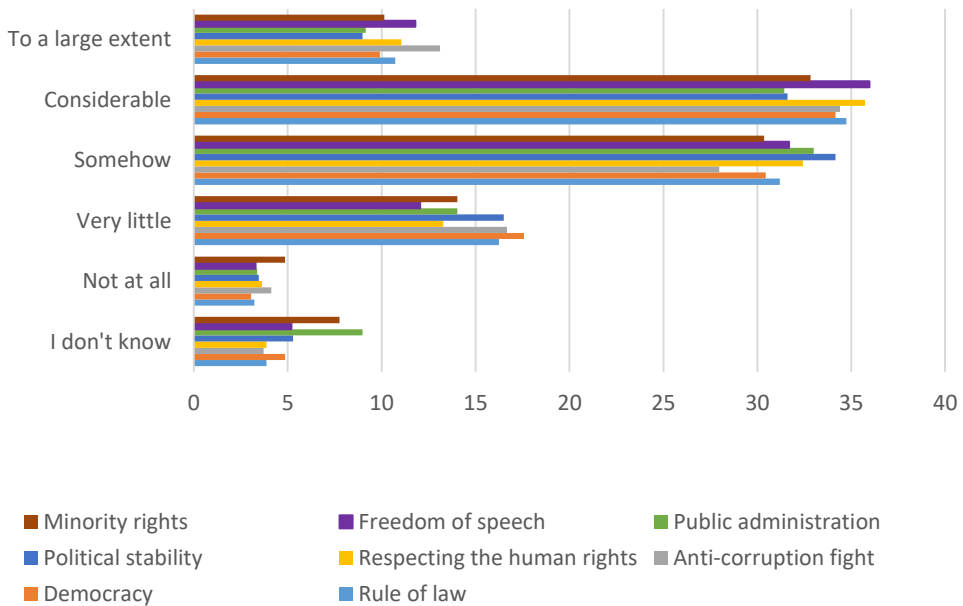
Iulian Groza

Similarly, at the societal level, Romania is perceived or somewhat perceived as an example to follow when it comes to the rule of law (45.4%), democracy (44.1%), fight against corruption (47.5%), respect for human rights (46.8%), political stability

^{*} The National Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA) is the Romanian agency responsible for preventing, investigating and prosecuting corruption-related offenses. DNA is generally regarded as a good practices example for the Republic of Moldova. See, for instance, <https://bit.ly/3lebBKa> and <https://bit.ly/3eGiGAN>.

(40.6%), administrative capacity (40.6%), freedom of speech (47.8%) and policy towards minorities (42.9%).

Figure 8. Do you think Romania could be considered a positive example for other countries in the region in the following: rule of law, democracy, fight against corruption, human rights, political stability, administrative capacity, freedom of speech, policy towards minorities? (%)

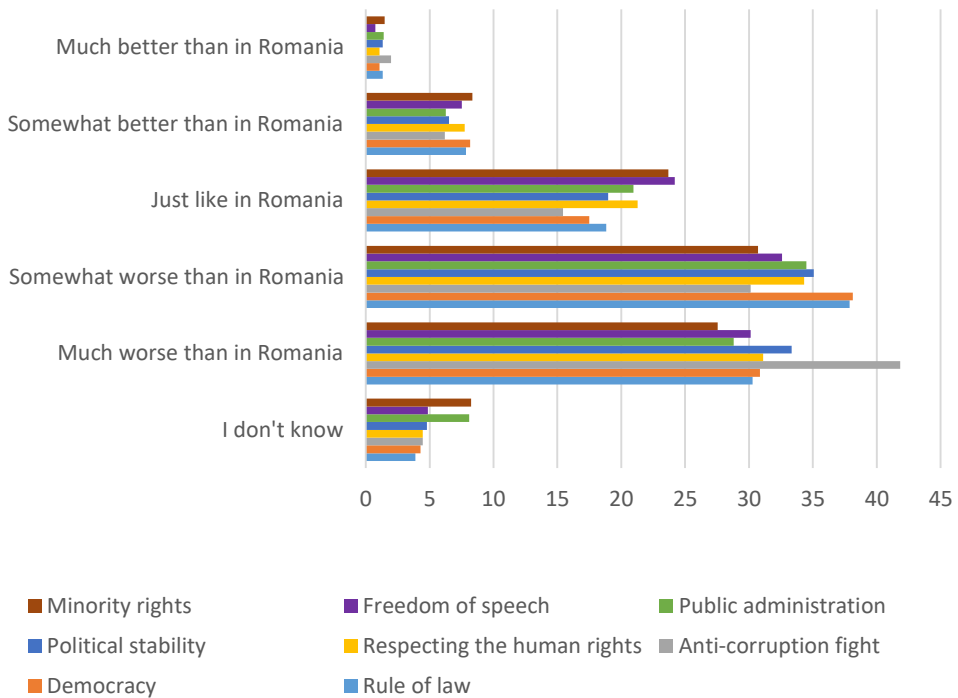


These findings are even more telling when respondents are asked to compare the domestic institutional capacity in the aforementioned fields in the two countries – between 58.3% and 71.9% of respondents consider that the situation in the Republic of Moldova is much worse or somewhat worse compared to Romania (Figure 9).

Romania’s expertise in military, education, economy, and, in particular, in fight against corruption is perceived as useful for implementing reform in the Republic of Moldova. In spite of Romania’s progress in a domestic institutional capacity, according to the experts, the country is lacking visibility in the region and is not well ‘promoted’. Moreover, although Romania possesses valuable human resources, it does not efficiently capitalize on them. For instance, Romania does not have any noticeable institute (think-tank) specializing in Eastern affairs, unlike Poland, Czech Republic or the Baltic countries. Moreover, in Romania there is insufficient expertise on the post-Soviet space, since lately most of the Romanian expertise has largely focused on the West, on securing membership in the Euro-Atlantic

organizations and on learning to act in an institutionalized arena. Consequently, this came at the expense of other areas and priorities in foreign policies, such as the immediate eastern neighbourhood, where Romania so far does not manage to make a visible impact. Last but not least, in foreign policy matters the Romanian political class and institutions are perceived as not sufficiently coherent in relation to the Republic of Moldova. Contradictory political messages coming from Bucharest have, according to the experts, affected Romania's actorness capacity towards Chişinău.

Figure 9. Compared to Romania how would you assess your country's rule of law, democracy, fight against corruption, human rights, political stability, administrative capacity, freedom of speech, policy towards minorities? %



In order to formulate policies, it is necessary to have experience, to have the necessary knowledge. And, unfortunately, Romania does not have that much. There are few experts in Romania specialized on the eastern space, who know Russian and Ukrainian languages.

Iulian Fruntaşu

”

Now Romania does not have a proactive diplomacy towards the east. The first big handicap is the language. [...] The lack of an institute specialized in the eastern vicinity is a huge problem for Romania.

Octavian Țicu

”

Romania should have people who study in Kyiv, Moscow, Minsk, in order to have more experience and expertise.

Iulian Frunțașu

”

The real problem of the Romanian expertise is the low visibility [...].

Anatol Șalaru

”

Another big problem we have in relation to Romania relates to Romanian political sectarianism, which divides the society in the Republic of Moldova due to the electoral campaigns [...]. [This] means that Romanian political actors have a different discourse towards the Republic of Moldova. [...] in relation to the Republic of Moldova there must be unity. [...] In general, in Romania, there is no consensus on what should be the major foreign policy interests.

Octavian Țicu

”

I believe Romania should have a strategic vision (for 5-10 years) and a unitary approach towards the Republic of Moldova, which should be shared by all political and governmental and public institutions in Romania, whether it is the presidency, the parliament, government, foreign ministry, defence, intelligence services, etc.

Iulian Groza

2.6. Membership in international organizations

The official discourse in the Republic of Moldova largely acknowledges Romania's support to Chișinău's European integration efforts.³⁰ Similarly, at the societal level, more than half of the respondents (57.4%) highly appreciate Romania's role in advocating for the Republic of Moldova's European trajectory. Moreover, Romania is perceived to have capacity to represent the interests of the region in the EU (55.6%) and NATO (45.9%).

Furthermore, Romania's contribution to keeping the eastern neighbourhood on the agenda of its Western allies is highlighted by the Moldovan experts. However, according to the experts, Romania has been less successful in uploading its priorities to EU/NATO policies, preferring instead to maintain a rather inactive stance, primarily following the cues of other major member states (such as France, Germany or the United States). When assessing Romania's contribution to the two organizations in relation to the eastern neighbourhood, experts believe that Romania's input to NATO is much more consistent than the one provided to the EU.

In fact, Romania is perceived as somewhat under-represented in the EU, where it punches below its weight.

” *Romania does not have the capacity to influence the regional context. Romania does not even have a very well-consolidated position vis-à-vis Ukraine. Romania hid behind the EU and NATO discourse. [...] Romania is under-represented in the EU and has not risen to the capabilities it has. I would have liked Romania to be like Poland, for instance.*

Octavian Țicu

The important role played by the international organizations in the eastern neighbourhood is fully acknowledged, but most of the time experts indicate the preference for direct contacts between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, not necessarily intermediated by the EU/NATO frameworks. Thus, the experts displayed strong support for strengthening of the bilateral relations, since Romania is much more willing and motivated to act in the Republic of Moldova's best interests compared to other EU/NATO member states, which sometimes do not hold similar view to Romania on how the relationship with the Republic of Moldova should be developed. A specific example where the two countries need to strengthen bilateral cooperation refers to the Transnistrian dossier.

” *I do not think that Romania has succeeded to impose its vision and interest towards the Republic of Moldova through its NATO or EU membership. In my opinion, bilateral contacts are more fruitful and more efficient.*

Ilian Cașu

” *There is much room for further strengthening of bilateral cooperation programs, from the basics of transferring expertise and experience in various fields, from security and defence to regional policies or, in general, everything related to good governance.*

Iulian Groza

” *The bilateral approach is the most important, given that Romania and the Republic of Moldova are neighbouring countries. The cooperation through the institutions is important too, because they have the capacity of internal control and monitoring.*

Natalia Ștercul

” *Romania must follow the European policy, but it must have its own voice, a distinct one to impose its expertise and recommendations at the EU level.*

Iurie Reniță

” *Romania has avoided taking an active position regarding the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, because the Transnistrian file is in the custody of the OSCE. Why did Romania act like this? Because Romania is very receptive to the messages coming from other European capitals. There is an inferiority complex of Romania in the EU and this complex must be overcome.*

Anatol Țăranu

In the same vein, the survey data indicate societal preferences (63%) for a direct, bilateral relationship with Romania to the multilateral one, within the EU or NATO.

Overall, most of the respondents (66.4%) consider or somewhat consider that the membership in the EU has had a positive impact on Romania's development. Concurrently, 46.1% perceive or somewhat perceive Romania's membership in NATO to positively contribute to the country's security profile. Taking this into account, 57.6% and 44.4% of the population of the Republic of Moldova perceive or somewhat Romania as a model for the integration into the EU and, respectively, into NATO.

3. ROMANIA'S ACTORNESS IN ITS EASTERN VICINITY: INTERNAL PERCEPTIONS

3.1. Size (surface and population) and geographic location

Being the sixth largest member state of the EU after Brexit, with an area of 238,397 km² and a population of roughly 19 million people, Romania could hold its size as a *de facto* opportunity when framing foreign policies in its Eastern vicinity.

By and large, the official discourse of Romanian authorities rarely makes references to the importance and influence derived from Romania's size and population. However, the geographic location is frequently mentioned and serves as a starting point for most of the strategical goals Romania has defined in the region (namely, the ones related to the eastern neighbourhood, the Black Sea basin, and the wider eastern frontier of the Euro-Atlantic community)³¹.

Meanwhile, at the expert level, ranking a country status in the hierarchy of states according to their size and geographical location is perceived as largely depending on the context and the reference system. While the majority of experts tend to converge to the opinion that Romania can be included in the category of middle-power states, others attribute Romania a 'small power status'. For example, Romania can be described within the EU as a medium-sized country, but in the global context Romania is more likely to belong to the category of small states.

”

If we refer to the European space, Romania is a medium-sized country. At the European level [...], we are the smallest of the big countries and the biggest of the small countries. Romania is a bit atypical in the EU [...]. Romania is a country with a population over those of small countries that have maximum ten million (from the Netherlands downwards to the Baltic countries, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary), but we are below the big countries, starting with Poland.

Julian Fota

”

We are a medium-sized country, we are not a small insignificant country.

Eugen Tomac

”

I consider that Romania is an important country in terms of its territorial area, in terms of population [...].

Ana Guțu

”

[Romania is] small and chaotic. In Europe it is a medium state, globally it is a small state.

Radu Magdin

”

Romania is a low level actor. Most say that we have a medium size and this would mean that we are a medium-sized actor. No, [...] we are in the group of small countries in the region and, of course, this has consequences.

Claudiu Degeratu

Nevertheless, the country's size (with reference to elements of numerical order, such as area, population, resources etc.) does not necessary translate into much power. Thus, some experts argue that Romania currently 'punches below its weight', pointing to the absence of the country's external activism particularly during the first term of president Klaus Iohannis (2014-2019), when internal infighting dominated the country's political agenda. In addition, Romania appears unable to convert physical resources at its disposal into appropriate modes of external action.

” *Romania 'punches under its weight' and does much less than it could do.*

Iulia Joja

” *We are an average country with potential that we have not yet really managed to properly use, but we are by no means among the countries that set the tone in the EU.*

Eugen Tomac

” *Both in Europe and globally, Romania is a chaotic state and it is perceived as chaotic and does not do follow-up.*

Radu Magdin

Another observation is that, both in the European and in the regional context, Romania is most often compared to Poland, a state with a population twice bigger and an area 1.3 times larger. Yet, unlike Romania, Poland is identified by the experts as a regional leader that allocates sufficient resources to be relevant and recognized as such at the European level.

” *Poland is the only medium power and also the only emergent power in the region.*

Claudiu Degeratu

With respect to Romania's geographic location, the experts underline that Romania's geostrategic position in the Black Sea area is becoming more salient considering the current regional security challenges.

” *Romania is the EU pillar in the Black Sea. [...]. Romania has the resources, it has the geographical location, it has the size [...].*

Armand Goşu

” *From a geopolitical perspective, Romania is facing big changes. [...] The Black Sea has been a marginal sea for the West for many years. Due to globalization, and also as a result of Russia's activism, the Black Sea has a very central position, much more central at this moment in this Eurasian geopolitics [...]. If the centre of gravity moves to the east, inevitably the importance moves.*

Iulian Fota

3.2. Economic weight

Although Romania's economy has seen a significant growth over the last three decades since the fall of the communist regime, it still lags behind the other Central Eastern European countries in terms of GDP per capita, being only second to last (Eurostat 2020)³². Consequently, Romanian experts tend to perceive Romania's economic capacity as not sufficiently prominent abroad.

”

Romania is [...] a rather small economy, because demographically we are dependent on the remittances coming from the Romanian diaspora. Romania would have an economic potential for an average economy, but we are not there.

Claudiu Degeratu

”

[...] a state that changes its fiscal code more than 100 times is considered unstable and unpredictable. For any investor the predictability is sacred from a legislative point of view. These components do not yet bring us into the category of highly developed and highly attractive states.

Eugen Tomac

”

Our investments in the neighbouring countries, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, not to mention Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, are very, very small.

Petrișor Peiu

Romania's official discourse towards Ukraine makes sporadic references to economic cooperation³³. These references are most of time part of Romania's discourse of support for Ukraine's economic integration with the EU³⁴. Yet, in general, cooperation has not been followed by concrete actions or has largely limited itself to cross-border activities, in spite of the growing interest manifested by the Ukrainian side to strengthen the economic ties between the two countries. By focusing almost exclusively on cross-border cooperation, Romania shows that in fact its main economic interest is narrowed down to the bordering regions, where the Romanian minority is mostly concentrated, whilst a strategy for more enhanced economic cooperation at the national level is currently missing. The lack of a wider economic strategy towards Ukraine is criticized by some of the Romanian experts, who emphasized the minor role, for instance, of the Romanian companies on the Ukrainian market, especially when compared to other EU countries, such as Poland or Hungary, which managed to build a stronger economic presence in the post-Soviet Eastern European space.

”

The economic field has an untapped potential for both sides. For Romania, the Ukrainian market is not interesting, because it requires considerable investments to make itself known, while for Ukraine the Romanian market is interesting, but requires consistent efforts to align with the required EU standards.

Angela Grămadă

In relation to the Republic of Moldova, the official discourse shows a recurrent emphasis on economic cooperation³⁵. Instead of dwelling solely on the cross-border dimension, the discourse towards the Republic of Moldova covers various issues, such as financial assistance, strategic investments, or trade exchanges, underlying the central place of the economic factor in the bilateral relations between the two countries. Romania has become Republic of Moldova's major trade partner; therefore its discourse is backed by concrete actions. One of the central topics is represented by the cooperation in the energy sector which means the implementation of big infrastructure projects as part of the overall energy interconnection strategy assumed by both countries (see, for instance, Iași-Ungheni-Chișinău gas pipeline). Moreover, Romania does not limit its actions to energy and/or trade, but also invests substantially in joint projects, especially in assisting the Moldovan authorities in the implementation of the Association Agreement³⁶.

The Romanian experts highlight the central place the economy holds in the relation between the two countries and the synergy that strong economic ties could generate bilaterally.

”

Geographical proximity naturally makes Romania the main trading partner of the Republic of Moldova, which is a premise of a very large influence.

Petrișor Peiu

”

Important steps towards EU would be the expansion of the economic relations [between Romania and the Republic of Moldova], of trade, investments in the Republic of Moldova.

Siegfried Mureșan

However, some of the experts report a series of challenges which, in their opinion, require profound consideration from the Romanian authorities. First, Romania lacks a long-term economic strategy vis-à-vis the Republic of Moldova: although Romania invests in the Republic of Moldova, these investments appear random, without being integrated into a concrete and unitary strategy. Second, the impact of Romania's investments is generally low. While Romania has concentrated most of its investments in the education and energy spheres, it has almost neglected sectors like mass-media, transport infrastructure, finance and banking, which could provide a much higher visibility. Third, a relative absence of major economic players

from Romania in the Moldovan market (i.e. Romanian companies and firms), which can enhance Romania's economic presence in the medium/long run, can be also observed. In addition, as indicated by the experts, Romania missed several opportunities of entering into the 'big businesses', such as the privatization of Moldova-Gaz, Chişinău airport, and Moldtelecom.

”

Romania invests a lot in the Republic of Moldova. [...] Over time we have developed an affinity for the Republic of Moldova and have included it in many strategic documents, but we have omitted to give these strategic documents a practical meaning in which to mention what to do exactly.

Angela Grămadă

”

Romania did not intend to participate in the privatization of strategic industries, airport, or Moldtelecom; in the banking system we have a somewhat limited presence, which only includes the Transilvania Bank [...]. In the field of electric power distribution, we did not intend to play a role, etc. Relying only on commercial ties will not create an organic, long-term link between the two economies. [...] We [Romania and the Republic of Moldova] will not have stable and important long-term relationships as long as we do not have big projects, joint ventures. [...] Currently, we are not in the top five foreign investors in the Republic of Moldova.

Petrişor Peiu

”

Romania is insufficiently present in the Republic of Moldova. First of all, this is because Romania's limited financial and economic capacities; Romania is not a rich power or state. Second, there are major deficiencies in the way in which the resources allocated by Romania to the Republic of Moldova are spent. I also refer to financial resources, grants, expertise etc. There are shortcomings, because Romania makes some mistakes when choosing its partners across the Prut. A clear example in this sense would be the partnership with the Democratic Party and the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc.

Ileana Racheru

3.3. Military capabilities

Although Romania currently spends 2% of its GDP for defence-related matters, in line with NATO requirements, its military strength is still modest and underdeveloped, owing to internal economic constraints and to a lack of investment in research and technology throughout the past decades³⁷. In their assessment of Romania's defence and military capacity, generally, the experts indicate that Romania has gone through important stages in the effort to strengthen its military and modernize its defence capabilities. Moreover, Romania has sought to assume a stronger convergence of the national security and defence policies with its Western partners, which translated into a gradual cultivation of the NATO/EU strategic thinking. However, the country still appears to have insufficient defence capacity and, in this regard, the membership in NATO is salient for the Romania's security, while the strategic partnership with the U.S. determines to a large extent the security profile Bucharest is able to project in the region.

”

[Our security profile] is clearly given by our membership in NATO and by the encouragement we receive from there. [...] On defence-related issues, things are indisputable; the whole effort is in a close coordination with NATO.

Angela Grămadă

”

[...] at the top of the Romanian state there was always coherence at the level of military commitments to NATO.

Siegfried Mureșan

”

Romania actively participates in the formulation of defence policies within the NATO alliance [...].

Hari Bucur Marcu

”

We have NATO soldiers on Romanian territory, we are involved in NATO missions, and we have also been to Iraq, Afghanistan or the Western Balkans. The Romanian Army is an extremely well integrated in the NATO security structures (...).

Eugen Tomac

When assessing the country's security outlook for the region, the official documents often includes the representation of Romania as a 'security provider'³⁸. According to some experts, this does not really have strong underpinnings and is often perceived merely as a repetitive political statement.

”

With respect to the projection of stability and security in the Black Sea and in the neighbourhood, it has been demonstrated that in the last 20 years Romania does not have this capacity. From my point of view this is an unfounded statement [Romania as a security provider]. [...] For me, being a provider of security and stability means having military and security initiatives in the neighbourhood, tangible results in security and defence cooperation with the respective states bilaterally and also being able to change significantly the security situation in our region.

Claudiu Degeratu

”

The concept of 'security provider' is completely empty for the region, because we do not provide security to anyone other than NATO; it is actually a concept that was created so that we could integrate into NATO and those people who created it then are still in power and are repeating the same things.

Iulia Joja

”

This phrase [Romania as security provider] was invented twenty years ago in the context of the war in the former Yugoslavia; it is ultimately our way of showing that we do not want to create problems, but to help solve them.

Iulian Fota

”

This [Romania as security provider] is a phrase we use almost with copy-paste all the time, which refers only to Mihail Kogălniceanu Airport and to the infrastructure that we make available to the Americans.

Armand Goșu

Furthermore, the experts see no solid arguments for using the expression ‘Romania – security provider’, since Romania does not have the resources, capacity, or even intentions to operate at the regional level in line with this statement. So far Romania has neither managed to individually contribute to the settlement of any regional conflict in the neighbourhood, nor has been able to provide any relevant security and defence initiative for the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine multilaterally.

”

We have neither contributed to the settlement of the conflict in Transnistria, nor to the settlement of the conflict in Ukraine, nor to those in the Caucasus.

Claudiu Degeratu

”

[...] Romania does not participate in any form in what is happening in Transnistria [...]. To be realistic, we could not be a player in Ukraine either [related to the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas region], but in relation to Transnistria we should be the main provider of expertise for all institutions in the EU and especially for NATO.

Petrișor Peiu

”

[On the Black Sea region] Romania did not come up with solutions. Practically, at the moment, we are the host of the two American bases and we are doing military exercises with NATO; but beyond that, it is not clear to me what we are doing with Ukraine or Moldova.

Iulia Joja

In general, the majority of experts question the military capabilities of Romania. Although the country is a NATO member, currently hosts two military bases (at Deveselu, Olt County, and at Mihail Kogălniceanu, Constanța County), and is actively involved in peacekeeping missions abroad, Bucharest does not seem to have the necessary resources to perform by itself in any defence related matters. This could be explained by the fact that over the years, military investments have been affected by both bureaucracy and corruption, whilst the country relied solely on the belief that NATO membership offers security. In addition, Romania’s military equipment is in general outdated and insufficient for ensuring security at the regional level.

”

[...] we felt so protected inside that Romania was very negligent in managing itself properly, especially from the military perspective. [...]. We actually left the army in tatters, because it involves high costs, it is expensive and there has never been enough money. In recent years we have thought that because we are in NATO and the EU we will be defended by our allies and we have invested money in other projects.

Iulian Fota

” *Romania is currently having trouble establishing its own military deterrence capacity against possible aggressions, such as the one posed by Russia. Here we have troubles setting up [the deterrence capacity], because we have a military budget that we fail to spend because of bureaucracy and corruption. Thus, we do not project anything; we have neither the military capabilities, nor the political resources, nor the political will to project the power that we have (both American and national) in the eastern neighbourhood.*

Iulia Joja

The only field, in which Romanian involvement was somewhat visible, according to the experts, was cyber-security. In fact, the important progress made by the Romanian military forces in this domain is being acknowledged even at the level of the NATO alliance, recognition which can be translated in future missions, or increased responsibilities.

” *As part of the NATO assistance package in Ukraine, Romania is a coordinator (Lead Nation) for the cybersecurity part managing a permanent coordination mechanism.*

Claudiu Degeratu

” *In relation to Ukraine, [...] Romania remains absent, apart from the cyberspace where it offers some support to Ukraine, but also through NATO structures, not bilaterally.*

Iulia Joja

Moreover, in recent years, the number of joint military exercises with the active involvement of Romanian forces together with other NATO states, where teams from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have been invited to participate, has increased. Yet, according to the experts, Romania would not have the capacity to organize military exercises by itself, without the support of its NATO allies.

” *Romania is limited to the field of standard military cooperation, usually at least 2-3 military exercises per year, exchange of officers for military training in military academies, but at a modest level.*

Claudiu Degeratu

” *Without the instruments provided by NATO, Romania has no possibility to organize other activities [...].*

Hari Bucur Marcu

” *[...] there are no joint regional exercises of military cooperation except under the auspices of NATO, so there is no initiative on the part of Romania to do so.*

Iulia Joja

3.4. Historical experience and culture

According to the Global Soft Power Index (GSPI) 2020 numbering 60 of the most influential countries across the globe, Romania ranks 52, behind other Central and Eastern European states³⁹.

Similar to the GSPI 2020 data, most of the interviewed experts have not managed to rank Romania's soft power in relation to the eastern neighbourhood high enough due to several reasons: incoherence, inconsistency, restrain; unbalanced relations with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine; the involvement of a limited amount of resources. According to our findings from the conducted interviews and also from the discourse analysis, references to historical experience and culture are important dimensions contributing to Romania's actorness. However, the approaches towards the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine significantly vary. For instance, Romania has a much more visible presence in the Republic of Moldova compared to the one in Ukraine which can be easily explained through the existing historical and cultural (first and foremost, linguistic) ties. Concurrently, the soft power appeal Romania displays vis-à-vis Ukraine is generally very modest.

”

The Romanian soft power [...] is limited to the Republic of Moldova. It is very little felt in Ukraine. It is a provincial behaviour that is [geographically] reduced only to the bordering territory [Romania is concerned about].

Armand Goșu

”

We can talk about soft power in the relationship to the Republic of Moldova and this is of a cultural-ethnic essence. [...] Towards Ukraine we do not apply elements of soft power; we apply the institutional mechanism provided by the EU and NATO.

Claudiu Degeratu

”

The Romanian soft power [...] is undoubtedly limited to the Republic of Moldova and is not very present there either. It is a soft power (too soft [sic]), that tries to make itself felt also in the areas inhabited by Romanians in Ukraine (I mean here the Chernivtsi oblast, the Transcarpathian oblast and the south of Bessarabia, the Odessa oblast). Otherwise, there is no attempt to design in any other form of soft power projection.

Petrisor Peiu

”

The Romanian soft power is dedicated solely to the Republic of Moldova.

Hari Bucur Marcu

Similarly, the official discourse of Romania signals a much stronger preoccupation with the Republic of Moldova than with Ukraine. Throughout the discourse there are various references to joint history, language, culture and traditions, which contribute to the special relations between the two countries⁴⁰. Thus, the strong

cultural and historical ties have been a sufficient argument for Romania to support the Republic of Moldova in multiple areas, particularly in the education and in the socio-economic fields. These activities included scholarships offered to Moldovan students to study in Romania, financial grants for the renovation of cultural and educational centres, etc. However, the Romanian experts appear to be somewhat sceptical about these initiatives seen as neither coherent, nor far-reaching, nor homogeneous. The experts also mentioned the limited addressability of Romania's policies in the Republic of Moldova, which focus exclusively on the Romanian-speaking population, thus ignoring the Russian-speakers.

”

Romanian soft power is of an older generation, in the sense that it focuses more on the needs existing in the Moldovan society (for example, the need for better education). Moldovans depend to a large extent on our educational facilities, on the possibility of mobility across Europe through Romanian citizenship, etc. [...] We don't have that 360-degree soft power, meaning that you design soft power elements for everyone based mainly on a public diplomacy strategy. We do less public diplomacy, because it is more expensive and more resources are needed. Therefore, the easiest way is to use this basic mechanism focused on the immediate, urgent needs of the partner who you project soft power to.

Claudiu Degeratu

”

In recent years, a mistake has been perpetuated in Romania, which has consisted in the fact that the soft power policy vis-à-vis Moldova mainly addressed the 'Romanophiles' from the Republic of Moldova who are a minority. Romania has not addressed Moldovans as a whole through its soft power instruments, which only reduced the numbers of 'Romanophiles' and further alienated those who were not.

Iulia Joja

Romania's actions envisaging support and assistance for the Republic of Moldova are not sufficiently known and reported in the mass-media (neither from Romania, nor from the Republic of Moldova), while the Romanian authorities do not undertake follow-up actions to ensure that these efforts are acknowledged by the Moldovan citizens. In fact, the interest of the Romanian public for what is happening in the Republic of Moldova is reduced, which is also reflected by low media coverage in the news programmes.

”

The eastern neighbourhood does not seem to be a concern of neither the academic system nor the mass-media in Romania. [...]. The population of Romania [...] is not attracted to the eastern neighbourhood at all, because it is seen as an unknown communist space, with dictatorships, with everything you can find bad and ugly.

Ileana Racheru

Meanwhile, in Ukraine, Romania's soft power is limited to the territories inhabited by Romanian minority⁴¹, which diminishes considerably the potential role

Romania's soft power instruments could play at the national level. In addition, Romania's exclusive concern only with its minority residing in Ukraine is seen by the Romanian experts as counterproductive, given that it affects the image and degree of trust Romania could benefit from the authorities in Kyiv.

” *We understood that in Ukraine there is a minority that could be used, when animosities [between Romania and Ukraine] could escalate.*

Angela Grămadă

” *The issue of minorities greatly affects the bilateral relationship from a political and social point of view. The degree of trust between the two countries is low and I do not see solutions as long as no other mechanism related to interethnic relations is discussed to reach a compromise. It's a much politicized subject.*

Claudiu Degeratu

” *The minority issues are widely discussed in our country and have been politicized from the beginning [...] and prevent the construction of a normal relationship [with Ukraine].*

Armand Goșu

3.5. Domestic institutional capacity and expertise

The domestic institutional capacity plays an important part in building Romania's external image in the Eastern vicinity. Romania largely employs the Euro-Atlantic values in its discourse, since it acknowledges the positive impact the participation in the EU and NATO have had on the modernization of its own institutions. Thus, references to democracy, stability, and rule of law abound when advocating for the European path of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine⁴². Both the official discourse and the experts place emphasis on this factor, which is seen as a driver of influence.

” *Romania's expertise is extremely demanded at the international level for two reasons: because Romania has the recent experience of a successful the Euro-Atlantic integration processes, and the experience of a political and economic transition process comparable to other states in the region.*

Iulia Joja

” *Romania could position itself more insistently as a reference country in the regional expertise [of the Euro-Atlantic integration].*

Ana Gușu

” *Romania could be an example for other countries in the region in the way [...] it implemented the anti-corruption measures.*

Armand Goșu

Particularly in the case of the Republic of Moldova, where Romania uses both multilateral and bilateral approaches, the discourse can be translated as unconditional support for Chişinău's European aspirations⁴³. According to the experts, Romania is considered by Chişinău a good example to follow, especially regarding the democratization and the fight against corruption. Thus, Bucharest tries to fill the role of a resourceful assistance provider to central government in Chişinău in order to facilitate Republic of Moldova's integration in the European structures.

Romania's official discourse towards Ukraine follows a similar trajectory; however, the rhetoric is considerably toned down. Romania does not show a proactive support to Ukraine's European integration efforts (as opposed to the case of the Republic of Moldova), but rather a passive stance, mostly declarative in nature. Yet, even at the discursive level, support to Ukraine's reforms and democratization is only framed from a multilateral perspective, with constant references to the EU and by permanently linking Ukraine with the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, the other two countries which signed Association Agreements with the EU⁴⁴.

”

Since the 1990s, an interesting regional approach for Romania has emerged, which has two major chapters: the Moldova chapter and the chapter of the rest of the post-Soviet countries. [...] So, if I were to summarize our concept of foreign policy in the neighbourhood, it would be like this: concentration, maximum bilateral and institutional focus at the international level on the Republic of Moldova. In the case of other countries we try to manage much of the bilateral issues through either structured or less structured formats of international cooperation.

Claudiu Degeratu

”

Romania acts in relation to Ukraine only as a NATO and EU member state and not as a priority neighbour, which has a major impact on the underdeveloped bilateral relationship. [...]. Romania's priorities vis-à-vis Ukraine are not very clear' [...]

Iulia Joja

”

Ukraine is the most important neighbour in the East. The Americans 'play' with the Ukrainians, the Germans 'play' with the Ukrainians, while the Romanians have excluded themselves from the regional game, since they don't have a clear strategic vision vis-à-vis Ukraine.

Armand Goşu

Moreover, in the experts' opinion, Bucharest is not making full use of its domestic achievements to set an example to follow for the countries in the post-Soviet space. Although certain topics, such as the Euro-Atlantic integration and/or the fight against corruption appear more frequently mentioned and seem to be the most visible abroad, other fields of expertise, such as justice reforms, digital security, or rural development, are not sufficiently employed externally.

” *There are fields where we excel [...], which can be role models for the states around us, especially with respect to judicial reforms.*

Siegfried Mureşan

” *The Ukrainians are very eager to learn from our experiences regarding the fight against corruption, the judicial system [...]. Specialists from civil society and academia claim that Romania is the best example of good practices for them [in these fields].*

Angela Grămadă

” *[The first example is] the path towards NATO and EU integration [...]. The second positive example would be the one related to the rule of law and the fight against corruption [...]. The third example would be related to the cyber, digital, and IT dimension, where Romania performed well.*

Claudiu Degeratu

” *Romania can be a model from the following point of view: it has had a very clear political option that all political parties have followed, namely the Euro-Atlantic integration [...].*

Petrişor Peiu

” *I think that Romania is starting to have an image of a reformed state in the post-Soviet space [...], to gradually acquire a European state profile with a model worth following. The first and most important area is democratization of the political regime following by justice reform, human rights, democratization and the fight against corruption, because all this means higher living standards.*

Ileana Racheru

Yet, there are also a couple of deficiencies signalled by the Romanian experts: the insufficient expertise existing in Romania vis-à-vis the former Soviet space and the narrow use of this expertise at the level of Bucharest's foreign policy. Specifically, they point out to the lack of experts in national structures capable of disseminating the acquired EU-related knowhow to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Moreover, the existing Romanian expertise is not adequately transferred to the country's official institutions and to the decision-makers, while the dialogue between decisional structures and academia is limited, likewise between decisional actors and the NGOs. This matter becomes even more disturbing when referring to the expertise on Ukraine, which is very scarce in Romania, at the institutional level.

” *We have a lot of experts on the Republic of Moldova, but these experts limit themselves to talking to a small group of people from Chişinău [...]. As for Ukraine, we are in a worst situation, we have no experts.*

Angela Grămadă

” *Our diplomats are fine, but we suffer in the area of think tanks [focusing on the eastern neighbourhood].*

Radu Magdin

” *If we look at the existing experts in the RMFA and in Cotroceni* or in other governmental institutions, there is very little expertise on the eastern neighbourhood. The Romanian government has very few Russian or Ukrainian speakers [...].*

Iulia Joja

” *The expertise on the Eastern neighbourhood is not sufficiently used in the Romanian public institutions or in the policy-making field. At the RMFA level, there are not even Ukrainian speakers.*

Armand Goşu

Finally, Romania does not appear to have a coherent and comprehensive foreign policy concept vis-à-vis the eastern neighbourhood, where most of its foreign actions seem patchy, mostly contextual, while lacking institutional coordination at the decision-making level.

” *Romania currently has a problem and this is reflected in the relation to the eastern neighbourhood: in asserting itself at a rhetorical level and then in acting on the basis of priorities of the foreign and security policies. [...] We cannot talk about Romania in the eastern space or in the NATO context, because we do not know exactly what the country wants. [...]. Romania's ambitions are extremely low in terms of the eastern neighbourhood.*

Iulia Joja

” *Romania has a mismatch between discourse and resources. This is caused by the lack of objectives. We only intend to exert regional leadership at the discursive level, since the resources and strategic elements are not aligned with any regional strategy. [...]. When the president of the country has not visited the neighbouring states in 5 years, this is a problem. [...] Romania remained in the pre-accession stage [to NATO and the EU] thinking and I believe that even at the moment we practice a policy of the 1990s-2000s.*

Radu Magdin

” *We cannot talk about a Romanian foreign policy vis-à-vis the eastern proximity, but about a Romanian policy towards the Republic of Moldova and towards certain bordering regions of Ukraine. In fact, we cannot craft a policy towards the Republic of Moldova either [...]. There is no coherence and quality at the level of decision-making and political institutions in Romania, while the Romanian political parties are not too concerned with the country's foreign policy towards the eastern neighbourhood.*

Armand Goşu

* Cotroceni Palace in Bucharest is the official residence of the President of Romania.

” *The Romanian foreign policy makers have been reluctant and reserved in proposing a security policy towards the eastern neighbourhood. [...]*

Hari Bucur Marcu

” *Clearly, Romania does not have a concept of foreign policy, it has tried to develop one several times, but it has not managed to define any. [...] There is no unitary approach at the government level and there is no clear objective. We do not really know the answer to the question: What do we want from this relationship? The objective at the level of public discourse is theoretical – to support the European path of the Republic of Moldova. But this objective is extremely vague [...].*

Petrișor Peiu

3.6. Membership in international organizations

Romania's membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures seems to have increased Romania's international profile and diplomatic posture and enhanced its ability to exercise persuasion in international negotiations. Furthermore, Romania's membership in the transatlantic organizations appears to act like an 'umbrella factor', which directly impacts other domains, such as the country's military capacity or economic performance. Romania's official discourse indicates that the country seems to assume the role of directly supporting Ukraine's and the Republic of Moldova's Westernization efforts, acting often as an intermediary between the two neighbouring states and the Euro-Atlantic structures⁴⁵. Romania frequently uses its membership credentials as a powerful bargaining chip in various cooperation initiatives with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, given that both the EU and NATO membership grant higher credibility and legitimacy.

” *[...] we managed to attract NATO and the USA to get more involved in the region. Romania, therefore, is trying to solve certain regional and bilateral problems through international institutions.*

Claudiu Degeratu

” *Romania's actorness is given, first of all, by its membership in NATO and this status also shows the key role we have at NATO's eastern border. [...]. Moreover, we play in the terms established by the mechanisms offered by the EU.*

Eugen Tomac

Overall, two different discursive approaches could be identified for each of the two countries.

Romania's official discourse towards the Republic of Moldova has remained relatively constant and coherent throughout the past years, with the Republic of Moldova ranking by far atop Bucharest's external interests. Thus, Romania shows

its strong and consistent support towards the European integration of Republic of Moldova and is willing to provide assistance through technical expertise or financial support. According to RMFA, developing a 'privileged' relationship with the Republic of Moldova has been a 'constant' preoccupation for Romania's foreign policy⁴⁶, since it 'represents a high-ranking priority for the Romanian Government and a matter on which a wide consensus has been reached within the entire Romanian society. Based on these prospects, Romania shall continue to provide a consistent and strong support to reforms and the European integration pathway, according to the aspirations of the citizens'⁴⁷.

Meanwhile, Romania's official discourse towards Ukraine tends to be far lower in intensity, narrower in vision and assumed role. Instead of a comprehensive assistance package, Romania limits itself to technical expertise towards specific areas (e.g. in cybersecurity). A major shift in Romania's discourse towards Ukraine can be observed after the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbass region. Ever since 2014 Romania has become a vocal supporter of Ukraine' sovereignty siding with other NATO/EU member states in condemning Russia's aggression and imposing sanctions on Moscow, while the discourse gained consistency and coherence around Ukraine's Europeanization efforts⁴⁸. In fact, 2014 appears to be a watershed moment and marks the 'restart' in the bilateral relations, as mirrored in the official discourse⁴⁹.

The experts consider that Romania's membership in EU and NATO represents indeed a highly valuable asset, and that Romania plays relatively well this intermediary role between these organizations, on the one hand, and Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, on the other hand.

”

Romania was a mediator towards the EU and NATO, an advocate, and when it comes to the East, we clearly assumed this mediator role vis-à-vis the Republic of Moldova; although, we have been active in Ukraine, Georgia and even in Azerbaijan for some time.

Julian Fota

”

Romania is a very good 'guardian' at the Euro-Atlantic [eastern] border.

Radu Magdin

Concurrently, the experts mention the apparent lack of initiatives on the Romanian side, indicating that Romania acts in the region more like an enforcer of the EU and NATO policies, rather than initiating relevant policies by itself.

”

Romania's role is extremely modest; our ideas are not promoted [...].

Hari Bucur Marcu

” *Romania has a difficulty to upload its national interests to the multinational, EU and NATO level.*

Iulia Joja

” *[...] we have not yet consolidated our profile very well within the EU, while Romania's initiatives have remained only as strategic objectives; they have not materialized in much deeper initiatives [...].*

Eugen Tomac

” *During presidency of the Council, Romania [...] failed to accelerate issues to which it could bring added value and especially regional issues, related to the Republic of Moldova, the eastern neighbourhood.*

Siegfried Mureşan

” *Romania is a passive member [...]. Romania has no initiatives, it only puts in place what is given from Brussels; Romania just executes what it is told.*

Ileana Racheru

Consequently, Romania is generally perceived to have a deficient foreign policy in relation to the EaP countries (with the sole exception of Republic of Moldova), preferring instead to stay in multilateral formats of cooperation, without assuming other autonomous roles or responsibilities outside of the EU/NATO frameworks.

” *If we look at what has happened over the last 20 years, Romania's tendency was to make the most of the multilateral formats, except for the Republic of Moldova, where the bilateral component was strong. From the perspective of the international relations, this is understandable. But from the perspective of the pragmatic field of public policies, it is more difficult to understand, because you do not see the short-term results.*

Claudiu Degeratu

” *Romania acts in relation to Ukraine only as a NATO and EU member state and not as a priority neighbour, which has a major impact on limited bilateral relationship. [...] At the EU and NATO level the room for manoeuvre is very limited due to the veto power of member states, which have a completely different policy. In this sense, Romania is obliged, if it wants to engage more in the region, to do so through bilateral relations.*

Iulia Joja

” *As far as the neighbours are concerned, the connections should be based first of all on the bilateral relations. [...] Romania must rely on itself at least as far as the relationship with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine is concerned.*

Petrişor Peiu

” *Romania does not matter much in the region, because it fails to connect bilaterally and personally with the diplomats of the neighbouring countries (e.g. Ukraine).*

Armand Goşu

Although Romania has institutional capacity, the experts believe Bucharest does not sufficiently indicate either the existence of a comprehensive strategic vision towards the near abroad or the willingness to take a leading role in representing the interests of the EU and NATO in the region.

” *I noticed in Kyiv and Chişinău a great reluctance to use Romania as a hub, a channel for talks with the EU, even less with NATO. I did not observe any interest of the officials from Chişinău to pass through Bucharest to get to Brussels; they preferred to get directly or through other partners. For example, Ukraine prefers Poland to Romania.*

Hari Bucur Marcu

” *I did not notice, despite the PR efforts of some Romanian ministers or institutions, that Romania is an EU gateway to the East. If Georgia needs it, it will solve it on its own, not passing through Romania. The same goes for Baku, Yerevan, or Kyiv. Romania does not matter in managing this flow of information towards Brussels, it is not the middleman. The middleman is elsewhere, in the North, in Poland.*

Armand Goşu

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to assess Romania's capacity and resources to exercise actorness in its immediate eastern vicinity, specifically vis-à-vis the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The first general conclusion is that Romania has displayed a low foreign policy appetite towards the post-Soviet space, in spite of the country's official discourse. According to our findings, we could not identify a comprehensive external agenda in relation to the eastern neighbourhood, but rather a limited, passive and contextual foreign policy stance, closely following the multilateral lines of action, namely via the EU and NATO frameworks. Thus, the second general conclusion is that the membership in the international organizations appears to be the most prominent factor determining Romania's overall actorness in the eastern neighbourhood.

With respect to the Republic of Moldova, Romania has shown a constant preoccupation and dedicated most of the available resources*. This confirms the 'Republic of Moldova first' principle at the level of Romania's foreign policy establishment. Yet, even here Bucharest's support has been characterized by a sort of political inertia, since Romania has not always managed to either update its policies or craft new, tailor-made instruments to respond adequately and in due time to the challenges facing the Republic of Moldova. In addition, Romania appeared to have been taken by surprise by some of the events unfolding in Chişinău. For instance, in June 2019 Romania watched from the sidelines how the EU, U.S. and Russia brokered a deal to back an unusual coalition between the liberal, Western-oriented ACUM Bloc and the pro-Kremlin Socialist Party, led by President Igor Dodon, to overthrow the Democratic Party and its strongman, Vladimir Plahotniuc, from power⁵⁰.

In the case of Ukraine, cooperation is almost exclusively intermediated by the Euro-Atlantic organizations. Although, particularly since 2014, Romania has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine's integration efforts in the EU and NATO, in practical terms bilateral links between the two countries were sporadic and limited to precise matters (i.e. security and minority issues). Moreover, at the time being the Romanian-Ukrainian bilateral relationship looks mostly pragmatic in nature, whereby shared security interests (i.e. fending off potential Russian aggressions in the region) seem to come first. Meanwhile, there is no clear perspective for a perennial, consolidated partnership. Ever since 2014, when sworn in as president of Romania, Klaus Iohannis has not made any official visit to Kyiv**, whilst Romania does not figure among the states considered of strategic interest for Ukraine,

* This is also reflected in the latest (2018) report of the Romania's International Development Cooperation Agency (RoAid), released in December 2019, whereby the Republic of Moldova is the main recipient of Romanian aid with 63.9% (149.2 mil. RON) of the dedicated budget. In comparison, Ukraine only receives 2.4% of the budget (5.5 mil. RON): <https://bit.ly/3eDd2j3>.

** In September 2017 President Iohannis cancelled plans to visit Ukraine after Kyiv adopted changes regarding education in minority languages.

according to the latest National Security Strategy adopted in Ukraine in September 2020⁵¹.

Some country-specific observations about Romania and about its actorness capacity have been drawn according to the three sets of findings from Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Romania.

External views: Ukraine

Generally, Romania is 'terra incognita' for the Ukrainian population. This is indicated, first and foremost, by the very high non-response rate, sometimes up to 30-40%, in the survey results. Ukrainians do not know much about their neighbouring country, which, in turn, makes it difficult for them to define their perceptions vis-à-vis Romania. 90.7% of Ukrainians have never been to Romania (5.9% have visited it once, maximum three times). This finding might be explained by the fact that very often economic and/or cultural cooperation between Ukraine and Romania is either limited to the borderlands or targets only national minorities. This leads to sometimes surprising, but still existing stereotypes at the level of societal perceptions.

1. *Size (surface and population) and geographic location*: Romania is not seen as a large country capable of exercising regional influence, since other actors from the region, such as the Russian Federation, Turkey, Poland, and Ukraine itself are much bigger both surface- and population-wise. Similarly, although Ukrainians admit that the geographic location of Romania is advantageous, they believe Ukraine's position is equally strategic or even better.
2. *Economic weight*: Romania's economy was rated from a future perspective, namely by looking at Romania's growth potential rather than by focusing on the current economic power. In spite of the long land border Romania shares with Ukraine and despite the fact that Romania was the first country to ratify the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, the economic cooperation with Romania is seen as modest, while Romania's economic presence on the Ukrainian market is nearly inexistent or limited to the borderland regions, at most.
3. *Military capabilities*: In Ukraine, Romania's military capacity is assessed primarily with reference to Romania's membership in NATO, which provided Romania high military standards. Beyond NATO's framework, Romania is not perceived sufficiently able to provide by itself security and stability in the region. Likewise, there is little knowledge of any format of military cooperation between the two states outside NATO's umbrella.
4. *Historical experience and culture*: interestingly, only 9.6% of Ukrainians consider that minority rights affect bilateral relations. This is somewhat in opposition to the general discourse in Romania, considering the frequent references to minority issues, which cover most of the news and public discourse about Ukraine in Romania. Most of the

interviewed experts agree on the high politicization of this topic, yet perceive it as the main 'stumbling block' to improved cooperation.

5. *Domestic institutional capacity and expertise*: Since Ukrainians know very little about Romania, they perceive Romania neither as a model of institutional capacity (democracy, rule of law etc.), nor of integration into the EU and/or NATO, nor as a country that could advocate for Ukraine's interests in the Euro-Atlantic community. Yet, Romania's main internal achievement ('success story') is considered the country's fight against corruption, which could serve as a model for Ukraine.
6. *Membership in international organizations*: Romania's membership in the EU and NATO has contributed significantly to the positive shift in the relations between the two countries, while 2014 is seen as a turning point in the bilateral relations from competition to partnership. Romania's membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures is perceived in Ukraine as the country's main source of actorness. Yet, Romania is not seen as the country that would be able to represent the EU's and NATO's interests in the region, given the following reasons: 1. the complexity of the wider Black Sea region and presence of other (more) influential state actors; 2. Romania's limited resources and activism.

Some practical recommendations have also stemmed from the study on the perceptions of Romania in Ukraine:

1. The general impression is that there is untapped potential at the level of the bilateral relationship, whereby the benefits of closer relations clearly outweigh the current 'status quo' characterized by modest cooperation. At the time being, increased cooperation appears to be still contingent on solving the divergences over the minority issues. Yet, Romania could choose to pursue its interests in parallel with displaying political determination and initiative in other fields of mutual interest: economic (e.g. increased attractiveness/improved access to Ukrainian companies on the Romanian market, which should be linked to reciprocal measures on the Ukrainian side; increased people-to-people contacts at joint business forums), political (e.g. assistance in the domains where Romania has proved it accumulated expertise, such as in the fight against corruption), security (e.g. show availability to support Ukraine in various defence-related matters, based on Romania's NATO experience and considering the existing Russian threat to the wider region).
2. There is an acute need for better transport connection between the two countries, since the existing infrastructure is poor (including here also the maritime transport over the Black Sea and the fluvial transport on the Danube River). This would not only contribute to the improvement of the economic ties, but also to the development of tourism. At the time being, Romania is not even in the first ten top Ukraine's trading partners*, which is surprising considering the fact that Ukraine is Romania's largest

* According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in January-July 2020 Romania was the 13th export and the 20th import trade partner of Ukraine, Статистична інформація: Економічна статистика / Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність, Географічна структура зовнішньої торгівлі товарами, <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>.

neighbour with whom it shares the longest border (roughly 610km). Moreover, according to our findings, Romania is mostly unknown to Ukrainians, which underlines the need to invest more resources in advertising Romania in Ukraine.

3. Romania should initiate bilateral discussions to tackle some of the sensitive historical events which affected the relations between the two countries; develop institutional capacity to promote Romanian culture at the national level in Ukraine, not merely limited to the Romanian minority living in the borderlands; generate more opportunities for common projects where stakeholders across the entire territory of Ukraine could participate**. Such initiatives would contribute to a more enhanced cooperation and refrain from stereotyping. In this regard, Romania could learn from the Polish experience in cultural diplomacy, which has somewhat managed to use the above instruments to overcome some of the negative perceptions existing at the level of the Polish-Ukrainian bilateral relations.
4. Joint projects for the Ukrainian and Romanian journalists should also be considered. This would potentially broaden the media coverage about the other country and, most important, would provide objective reporting and counter the tendency to politicize sensitive issues (such as, minority rights, alleged territorial claims, etc.). Furthermore, joint media projects could extend the journalistic scope and cover other informative topics (economy, culture, geography and tourism, etc.).
5. Another avenue of cooperation should consider the expertise the two countries possess. At the expert level, increased cooperation should constantly tackle ways to consolidate bilateral security ties (i.e. Romania's experience of complying with the NATO standards can be beneficial also for Ukraine and, in this regard, the transfer of knowledge from Romania to Ukraine is useful), to establish institutionalized frameworks for common matters of interest (such as, the diversification of the energy supplies, consolidation of the civil society, minority rights, support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic efforts, etc.). This joint expertise can be afterwards used by national and local authorities to develop better-suited policies to strengthen bilateral relations.

External views: The Republic of Moldova

Generally, Romania's actorness is felt and acknowledged in the Republic of Moldova, while the bilateral ties are important and valued by the Moldova side. Moreover, compared to Ukraine, Moldovans are generally aware of and/or familiar with Romania. Yet, a recurrent observation has indicated Bucharest's lack of a clear strategic thinking and coherent vision vis-à-vis the Republic of Moldova. In spite of the constant preoccupation with the developments in the Republic of Moldova, the general impression is that Romania's approach is mostly pragmatic and adaptive in nature, depending on the existing political context in the Republic of Moldova (i.e. Romania looks active and engaged when the Moldovan ruling elites show a strong

** Currently, the Joint Operational Programme Romania – Ukraine 2014-2020 (<https://www.ro-ua.net>) covers only the border area between the two countries.

interest in enhancing ties with the West vs. distant and cold when the political forces in Chişinău are leaning toward the East). Romania has certain unexplored capabilities and bargaining chips in the relation with the Republic of Moldova, which do not justify Romania's timid external behaviour.

1. *Size (surface and population) and geographic location:* The overall perception in the Republic of Moldova indicates Romania has important regional potential, given its size and population (particularly when compared to the Republic of Moldova itself). In spite of these assets, there are certain internal (i.e. not capitalizing on its expertise and human resources) and external (i.e. complicated geopolitical context) aspects that constrain Romania's capacity to be an influential player in the region (including vis-à-vis the Republic of Moldova).
2. *Economic weight:* Although Romania has experienced a significant economic growth in the region, this economic capacity has not been entirely felt in the Republic of Moldova. In spite of being active in supporting and assisting the Republic of Moldova financially, Romania investments are not sufficiently well thought, do not target strategic economic sectors, while most of them originate from the public sector.
3. *Military capabilities:* The overall perception is that Romania does not have sufficient military and defence-related resources to play an important role in the region, outside NATO's umbrella. Romanian-Moldovan bilateral cooperation in the military field is in general moderately assessed. However, talks over enhanced military cooperation are sensitive, since the Republic of Moldova is a constitutionally neutral country.
4. *Historical experience and culture:* History and culture represents an important asset underpinning Romania's actorness vis-à-vis the Republic of Moldova. Yet, the assessment over the use of Romania's soft power elements has been mixed: while some experts believe Romania's financial assistance needs be contingent on a clear allegiance to pro-European/pro-Romanian values (i.e. to target localities, political parties, NGOs which display a strong and demonstrated pro-Western commitment), other consider support should adapt to the local contexts and address the broader society (including the Russian-speaking segment of the population), which does not necessarily share similar views and values as the first group.
5. *Domestic institutional capacity and expertise:* Romania is perceived as a good model to follow in many areas (such as, economic development, judicial system and the fight against corruption, European integration, etc.). Yet, so far, Romania does not manage to capitalize on this experience externally, by using its expertise in the aforementioned fields in much more impactful way.
6. *Membership in international organizations:* Romania is seen as an important and valuable member of the Euro-Atlantic structures in the region. Furthermore, according to the Moldovan perceptions, Romania's actorness and capacity to provide regional security and stability are mostly given by Romania's membership in the EU/NATO. Nevertheless, a strong preference for bilateral forms of engagement (even for distinct action outside the EU framework) with the Republic of Moldova has been displayed both at the level of the general public and at the expert community.

Some practical recommendations have also stemmed from the study on the perceptions of Romania in the Republic of Moldova:

1. A blueprint for consolidating Romania's ties in the political, economic, cultural and societal fields for the Republic of Moldova should exist (i.e. 'a country action plan'). Such roadmap could constitute a medium/long-term vision for the Republic of Moldova and needs first to be agreed upon and assumed by all the political forces in Romania. Second, the application of such plan should be consistent and perennial, regardless of the leadership in Chişinău. Since we began our study in autumn 2018, a positive step has already been undertaken in Romania; in February 2020, the Department for the Relations with the Republic of Moldova (DRRM) was created within the Romanian Government⁵². Yet, apart from financing educational, cultural and mass-media activities mostly aimed at preserving the Romanian identity in the Republic of Moldova*, DRRM might take the lead in drafting a 10-year comprehensive plan to guide Romania's foreign policy towards the Republic of Moldova by including other concrete areas of common interest (economic development, infrastructure, private investments, diversification of the energy supplies, etc.). This plan would serve as a basis for public debate in the Romanian political and societal environment. The outcome of this joint endeavour should afterwards be translated into a 10 year-strategic framework for the cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, which could be correlated also with the EU's ENP Action Plan.
2. Romania should insist on a coherent stance vis-à-vis the Republic of Moldova, whereby all Romanian institutions and authorities communicate a similar position to Chişinău. In the past contradictory messages emerged from the authorities/institutions in Bucharest, which ultimately affected Romania's credibility and actorness.
3. In relation to both the EU and NATO, Romania needs to capitalize more on its 'middleman' role between the Republic of Moldova and the Euro-Atlantic structures. Although the multilateral formats of cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the West are extremely useful, Romania should consolidate its 'voice' at the EU level by uploading its foreign policy preferences in a much more visible way. Similar to "Trio 2030 Strategy" initiative proposed by Lithuania to enable better sector-by-sector integration with the EU for Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova**, Romania could come up with 10-year plan to strengthen cooperation with the Republic of Moldova. This would signal additional determination on the Romanian side to assume concrete responsibility at the EU level to support the Republic of Moldova's European aspirations.
4. So far, Romania has not appeared to be able to sufficiently communicate ('promote') its financial support for the Republic of Moldova, since the Moldovan society seems to be not fully aware of Romania's contribution to various projects (such as, the refurbishment of schools and kindergartens, cultural monuments, etc.). Romania

* These are the priority fields financed by the Romanian Government in 2020, <https://bit.ly/2GN6Ulw>.

** The "Trio 2030 Strategy" was proposed in November 2019 by the Lithuanian delegation in the European People's Party and should pave the way for the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council in 2027, Euractiv, November 21, 2019, <https://bit.ly/32uaPI8>.

should increase the visibility of its actions in the Republic of Moldova through a much wider dissemination. Moreover, Romania should consider reorienting some of the resources to other destinations, which are likely to carry more impact on the public perception, such as the road infrastructure. For instance, the repair of roads could be chosen based on their critical importance for the transportation system in the Republic of Moldova. Similarly, an immediate preoccupation for Romania would be to focus on providing accessibility between the two countries (namely, by building or repairing national roads and bridges across the Prut river). Another salient field in which Romania should redirect the investments is the media segment in the Republic of Moldova, which is strongly affected by the quality of the information (i.e. numerous cases of disinformation have been recently reported in the Republic of Moldova⁵³). Such move would entail support for the diversification of the sources of information, support for the independent press, technical assistance to independent journalism, and the transfer of know-how and expertise to improve the legal and regulatory press environment in the Republic of Moldova. This support should not be limited to the media sources having pro-Romanian/pro-unionist views.

5. Romania should reconsider its economic potential in the approach towards the Republic of Moldova and concentrate its efforts on important investments in some of the main economic and financial sectors in the Republic of Moldova (such as, the Moldovan electric network, postal services, telecommunications, IT, consultancy, insurance and financial services, establishment of joint agricultural and industrial clusters, assistance to establish a stock-exchange in Chişinău), particularly since Romania has already acquired the expertise and the necessary experience in the EU's market, along with some key advantages, such as geographic proximity, common language and culture. In this regard, apart from public investments, Romanian private entrepreneurs should be also incentivized to play a much more active role on the Moldovan market.
6. Another important course of action for Romania, linked to the previous recommendations, is to increase staff exchanges in order to strengthen the institutional capacities of the Republic of Moldova, foster mobilities to enhance peer-to-peer relations at the level of the expert community, business community, civil society representatives, researchers and/or journalists.

Internal views: Romania

Generally, the findings from Romania show many similarities to the ones drawn from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Both the official discourse and the expert interviews reveal a decisional inhibition and a misapprehension of the strategic role that Romania has in the regional context, misapprehension, which has translated over the years in fragile partnerships and missed opportunities. Moreover, experts observe the lack of a well-defined strategic agenda for the post-Soviet space (i.e. a clearly defined foreign policy concept), but a rather patchwork

of policies and initiatives, mostly contextual and reactive (i.e. developed typically in response to challenges or emergencies).

1. *Size (surface and population) and geographic location:* The overall perception has been mixed: first, the experts have difficulties when asked to position Romania in the hierarchy of states depending on their power and external influence. They oscillated between including Romania either in the 'medium' or 'small' group of states. In spite of its strategic geographic position, the country's political activism in advancing policy preferences beyond its eastern borders (see, for instance, the limited relevance of Romania's Black Sea Synergy) has been so far modest.
2. *Economic weight:* Rating Romania's economic capacity has been also challenging, since the experts could not converge to a similar assessment. While Romania's economic potential is acknowledged, the main observation is that the country has underperformed in relation to the region. For instance, Romania's economic presence in the post-Soviet space has so far not been backed up by the presence of major Romanian investments (i.e. firms, companies, regional economic initiatives), which sees Romania lagging behind other EU/NATO countries in the region (such as Poland or Hungary).
3. *Military capabilities:* Although Romania's defence and military capacity is currently undergoing an important modernization effort, the overall agreement is that Romania does not yet have resources to take initiative/exert leadership in any defence related matters in the region, preferring instead to hew to the NATO/US strategic plans.
4. *Historical experience and culture:* Romania's soft power based on cultural and historical elements is generally limited to the Republic of Moldova, while almost absent at the regional level (with the exception of the Romanian-Ukrainian borderland territories inhabited by the Romanian minority). Yet, the reaction to the current agenda dwelling chiefly on preserving the Romanian identity has been mixed, many experts pointing to the narrow-sightedness of this approach, since Romania misses important opportunities to promote the image of the country in the wider region.
5. *Domestic institutional capacity and expertise:* While Romania was able to carry out important internal reforms and consolidate its institutions according to the Western standards, it has only sporadically been able to export 'good practices', since this transfer of know-how has not been underpinned by (and/or included in) a comprehensive foreign policy agenda in relation to the eastern neighbourhood. Meanwhile, the existing expertise on the post-Soviet space appears either limited or not sufficiently integrated in the decision-making process.
6. *Membership in international organizations:* The membership in the international organizations appears to largely shape Romania's actorness in the post-Soviet Eastern European space. Yet, Romania is hardly an initiator of policies/strategies at the eastern flank of the Euro-Atlantic institutions. On the contrary, this deliberate move to outsource foreign policy to the institutions it belongs to (the EU and NATO) has given Romania limited incentive to develop by itself a comprehensive external policy towards its near abroad.

Some practical recommendations have also stemmed from the study in Romania, which could strengthen Romania's actorness:

1. In order to be an important foreign policy actor in the eastern neighbourhood, Romania needs to display much more activism abroad and political will (i.e. be more creative and less reactive). An urgent step would be to come up with a clear agenda document to undergird Romania's actions towards the post-Soviet space. In this regard, a 'white paper' produced by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs could provide in the near future a basis for consultation and debate and address some of the following questions:
 - a. Does Romania want to play a stronger regional role and provide stability and security for the post-Soviet region? Or, perhaps, reluctance, caution and restraint constitute, in fact, a deliberate foreign policy choice (i.e. the main rationale behind the country's conduct of external affairs)? In the former case, what actions this desideratum involves in practice, apart from the ones envisaged under the EU/NATO umbrella?
 - b. What are actually Romania's objectives in relation to its eastern proximity and the wider Black Sea and post-Soviet space? Is there a list of priorities at the foreign policy level with respect to the near abroad?
 - c. What foreign policy instruments could best serve these objectives? For instance, if the economic (or cultural) means seem to be the most appropriate, how should Romania practically engage? How would, say, a 10-year roadmap for improved economic/cultural diplomacy look like? What would be the main lines of action?
2. Regardless of the answers to these questions, a general recommendation indicates the need for strengthening more the bilateral dimension of cooperation (for instance, with Ukraine), besides the institutional multilateral frameworks provided by the EU/NATO. Personal contacts at the political, economic, cultural and societal level are salient and should be encouraged by organising bilateral staff exchanges and visits.
3. Romania should enhance its expertise in the post-Soviet space. To this end, incorporating the already existing academic expertise in the policy-making process, support for the establishment of an institute/think-tank specialized in the wider Black Sea, the Eastern Partnership states and Russia, aimed at collecting first-hand data in Russian and Ukrainian languages to provide analytical support for the decision-makers is generated (i.e. studies, reports), should be some of the immediate priorities.
4. For a much more visible economic presence in the region, Romania should intensify cooperation with the neighbouring countries to facilitate the access to the neighbouring markets to Romanian private investors and entrepreneurs. There is a lot of untapped economic potential and valuable human resources (for instance, in both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova) which could be successfully targeted by the Romanian companies/firms, provided that bilateral cooperation frameworks exist at the state level.
5. Romania should display more activism within the EU and NATO structures. For instance, it would be desirable to sign and implement an agreement with Ukraine and the

Republic of Moldova to ensure border security or enhance civil-military cooperation with Ukraine in the maritime and airspace with NATO's support. Another suggestion would be the establishment of stronger partnership with Ukraine aimed at enhancing defence and military cooperation.

6. Last but not least, Romania should not shape its actions/policies in the immediate neighbourhood solely based on geopolitical/geostrategic arguments (i.e. West vs. East; EU/NATO vs. Russian Federation), but also pay additional attention to (and provide support to) tackling domestic challenges in the neighbouring countries, such as the ones related to the rule of law, democracy promotion, good governance and justice reforms, by using its already gained expertise.

Annex 1. List of conducted interviews in Ukraine*

Interview 1.	Natalya Belitser, 'Pylyp Orlyk' Institute for Democracy
Interview 2.	Serhii Bostan, Institute for Political and Geopolitical Researches
Interview 3.	Expert, name remained anonymous, Ukrainian Institute for International Politics
Interview 4.	Sergiy Fedunyak, Yurii Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University
Interview 5.	Tetyana Filevska, Ukrainian Institute
Interview 6.	Sergiy Gerasymchuk, Foreign Policy Council 'Ukrainian Prism'
Interview 7.	Serhii Hakman, Euroregion 'Upper Prut' Working Committee on Interregional and International Relations, Local Self Governance and Mass Media
Interview 8.	Mykola Kapitonenko, Institute of International Relations Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
Interview 9.	Yevhen Mahda, Institute for World Politics
Interview 10.	Yaroslav Matiychyk, MFA Public Council, Strategic and Security Studies Group
Interview 11.	Policy maker, name remained anonymous, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine
Interview 12.	Policy maker, name and affiliation remained anonymous
Interview 13.	Policy maker, name and affiliation remained anonymous
Interview 14.	Oleksii Poltorakov, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
Interview 15.	Andrii Veselovskyi, Hennadii Udovenko Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine at the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

* All the affiliations indicated in Annex 1-3 correspond to the date when the interview was conducted. All the opinions expressed in this study are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the institutions the interviewed experts are affiliated with.

Annex 2. List of conducted interviews in the Republic of Moldova

Interview 1.	Ilian Cașu, 'Our Party' Political Party
Interview 2.	Viorel Chivriga, IDIS Viitorul
Interview 3.	Iulian Groza, Institute for European Policies and Reforms
Interview 4.	Iulian Frunțașu, TVRM
Interview 5.	Veaceslav Ioniță, IDIS Viitorul
Interview 6.	Daniela Morari, Mission of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union
Interview 7.	Igor Munteanu, Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, ACUM Political Party, DA Platform
Interview 8.	Iurie Reniță, Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, ACUM Political Party, DA Platform
Interview 9.	Natalia Stercul, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova
Interview 10.	Anatol Șalaru, National Unity Party
Interview 11.	Ion Șișcanu, Institute of History, Academic of Science of Moldova
Interview 12.	Anatol Țăranu, Centre for Strategic Rsearch and Political Consultancy (POLITICON)
Interview 13.	Octavian Țîcu, Institute of History, Academic of Science of Moldova

Annex 3. List of conducted interviews in Romania

Interview 1.	Claudiu Degeratu, National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, the Romanian Academy
Interview 2.	Iulian Fota, Mihai Viteazul National Intelligence Academy
Interview 3.	Armand Goșu, Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest
Interview 4.	Angela Grămadă, Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association
Interview 5.	Ana Guțu, Department for the Relations with the Republic of Moldova, Government of Romania
Interview 6.	Iulia Joja, Frontier Europe Initiative, Middle East Institute, Georgetown University
Interview 7.	Radu Magdin, Smartlink Communications
Interview 8.	Hari Bucur Marcu, Săliște Association for the Romanian Europeanism
Interview 9.	Siegfried Mureșan, European Parliament, Group of the European People's Party
Interview 10.	Petrișor Peiu, Department of Economic Analysis, the Black Sea University Foundation
Interview 11.	Ileana Racheru, Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest
Interview 12.	Eugen Tomac, European Parliament, Group of the European People's Party

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About the project

Boosting Romania's role as a security provider in its immediate vicinity (the cases of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova) | RoSec
PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0073 | 2018-2020

This study investigated whether Romania could play a much more active role in its immediate neighbourhood (specifically, towards the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) and, thus, contribute to strengthening regional stability and security.

More details about the projects are available on the website <http://cse.uaic.ro/rosec/>

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