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# HIGH TIDE

## Romanian Security on Europe's Frontline

U.S.-Romania Initiative  
Defense and Security Working Group

# Table of Contents

**The Issue 1**

**Introduction 2**

**Assessing the Threat 3**

**The Challenges 4**

**Policy Recommendations 8**

**Conclusion 14**



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# THE ISSUE

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After 25 years of stability and prosperity in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the Russian annexation of Crimea changed the regional security landscape and brought back into question the foundational security arrangements on Europe's eastern flank. As the staunchest U.S. ally in southeastern Europe, and with key strategic interests in the Black Sea, Romania is ideally positioned to lead in the areas of stability and security. In order to fully develop this potential, Romania will have to consider the threats and implications of its new security environment and calibrate its defense policy accordingly. But what might these changes look like, and how could they best be implemented?

To answer these questions, the Romania Security and Defense Working Group at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) conducted an extensive assessment of the challenges that Romania will have to address in the near future. This report groups these challenges into four main categories: (1) pressure on Romania's eastern frontier; (2) the militarization of the Black Sea; (3) non-kinetic dangers, such as the use of information warfare tools inside Romania; and (4) the underprepared state of the Romanian Armed Forces. The analysis and recommendations presented under each category emphasize the stabilizing role that a country like Romania could play in its region and in the transatlantic alliance.

# Introduction

The past 25 years have been the most prosperous, stable and free in the long history of Central and Eastern Europe. Following the Cold War, the cluster of small and mid-sized states between the Baltic and Black Seas found themselves without an outside threat for the first time in their modern history. During this period of unusual tranquility, Russian military weakness and membership for most CEE states in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) allowed formerly communist states to heal from the wounds of their previous regimes and focus on building human capital, political institutions and the open economies of modern European states.

Nowhere were the effects of this respite from geopolitical pressures more profound than in Romania. In less than a generation, the former police state of Nicolae Ceaușescu evolved from a top-down regime with a closed foreign policy to a thriving, democratic power that was fully integrated in the world's largest and most successful security alliance: NATO. The country became a full contributor to collective defense; its armed forces engaged in peacekeeping expeditionary missions across the globe; and it made significant contributions to out-of-area operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Ukraine crisis (2014-present) signaled a return of old geopolitical pressures that have shaped the strategic behavior of Russia's neighbors. The Kremlin's illegal annexation of Crimea and occupation (via proxies) of eastern Ukraine have demonstrated that Russia is territorially unsatisfied, militarily capable, and ideologically opposed to a rules-based system of international governance. This behavior runs counter to the post-1989 settlement of Europe and the peaceful security environment that frontline NATO states had come to enjoy. For the first time in a generation, Romania has an active predator in its security ecosystem.

In response to these changes in the CEE region, CEPA assembled the Romania Security and Defense Working Group. Composed of more than 25 leading Romanian and American security experts, the Group assessed the new perils that the Romanian state could face in a post-Crimea geopolitical environment. Over a six-month period, the Group evaluated the internal and external challenges to ensuring that Romania remains safe and secure. These include: (1) pressure on Romania's eastern frontier; (2) the militarization of the Black Sea; (3) non-kinetic dangers, such as the use of information warfare tools inside Romania; and (4) the underprepared state of the Romanian Armed Forces. How effectively Romania addresses these dangers will determine the extent to which it is able to act as a stabilizing force in the CEE neighborhood.

# Assessing the Threat

The return of traditional geopolitics poses serious risks to NATO's frontline allies. While much of the focus in U.S. policy has been on potential threats to the Baltic region, the perils to the Black Sea region are no less significant. For Romania in particular several problems now loom.

> First and most importantly, the activities of the Russian military and its proxies inside Ukraine increase uncertainty over the territorial stability of that country's Black Sea coast. This is particularly true in the case of southern Ukraine – with which Romania has a direct land border – and the Republic of Moldova – the security of which is a major policy priority for Romania. Since its independence from the Soviet Union, Romania has actively promoted the cause of Moldova's territorial integrity and EU integration and pushed for robust democratic reform inside the country. Romania has likewise been a source of aid and technical assistance for Moldova. Counterbalancing these factors is Russia's use of diplomatic, informational and economic (including energy) soft power in Moldova. This has allowed Russia to exert a strong influence over Moldovan politics and society. In the short term, it is unlikely that Russia will act against Moldova in military terms. At the same time, Moldova's frozen conflict in the Russian-backed separatist region of Transnistria could easily become a trigger for armed confrontation. Russia also actively supports separatism in Gagauzia, another Moldovan autonomous region. In either event, the failure of Moldova's economic prosperity, democratic development and Western integration would be good for Russia and bad for Romania and the transatlantic community.

> Second, the expanding presence of Russia in Crimea creates the prospect of a rapidly remilitarizing Black Sea. Aviation patrol routes and enlarged air and naval defense networks heighten Russia's ability to threaten and interdict foreign fleets – as illustrated by recent Russian harassment of NATO vessels. Moscow has deployed numerous missile-bearing ships and planes to the Black Sea area, which, together with the likely presence of Iskander missiles in Crimea, places all of the Black Sea littoral, including Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and the Caucasus, within range of Russian conventional – and weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-capable – missile attacks. At present, none of America's allies in this part of Europe possess effective air and missile defense abilities.

> Third, as a recent CEPA analysis has noted, Russia also poses a threat to Romania through non-kinetic methods such as information warfare.<sup>1</sup> This has become a widely recognized problem in various frontline states in CEE and more recently at the level of the EU. Across Europe and Eurasia, Moscow's instruments of disinformation are deployed in a constant, regular and systematic effort to dismiss critics of Russian policy; distort facts; distract from substantive policy issues (such as Russia's revisionist policies in the CEE region); and dismay the audience. In Romania, Russian disinformation seeks to erode public faith in democratic institutions by creating the impression that EU accession was a failure and that anticorruption and reform initiatives are foreign interference. Even though the opposite is true, Russia's media outlets inject these views into the minds of Romanian audiences.

The net result of all three problems is to place added pressure on Romania at a time when the country seeks to consolidate the gains from its transition to democracy and a market economy. Contending with them means making a sober assessment of where Romania's main vulnerabilities are and the options it has to ward them off.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Lucas and Ben Nimmo, *CEPA Infowar Paper No. 1: How Has Russia Weaponized Information?* November, 2015.





## The Militarization of the Black Sea

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Black Sea Basin gained an unprecedented geostrategic eminence in the context of transatlantic security. The Kremlin has declared that Crimea will be strengthened as Russia's main staging area for the Black Sea and the Balkan region, including the staging of nuclear weapons. The Russian arsenal in Crimea is likely to grow. Although the Black Sea Fleet is obsolete in terms of hulls, its missile capabilities and those of the combined armed network of planes deployed in the Black Sea is formidable. Moreover, up to 30 new ships are supposed to join the fleet by 2025. By 2020, Moscow plans to spend \$2.4 billion to modernize its navy and the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Crimea. The purpose of this modernization is to build a combined arms force that can deny NATO access to the Black Sea and at the same time project power outward into the Mediterranean, thus threatening not only the Balkan states but also the Middle East and Mediterranean interests of NATO.<sup>2</sup> This force, which is already being optimized for what is referred to as A2/AD (anti-access, area denial) operations can also be used to threaten European neighbors with long-range air and missile strikes. Moreover, Moscow is steadily pursuing the goal of obtaining naval and army bases throughout the Balkans and Mediterranean from which it can project power further afield, even into the Western Balkans.



**\$2,400,000,000**

**By 2020, Moscow plans to spend \$2.4 billion to modernize its navy and the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Crimea.**



**30 New Ships**

**By 2025, Moscow plans to send up to 30 new ships to the Black Sea Fleet.**

Although Moscow's ultimate plans may not be realized in full, even a partial realization of these goals puts all the littoral states under serious threat. With a strong NATO focus on securing the Baltic Sea area through elaborating Baltic training exercises and deploying several thousands of troops to the region, the Russian plans for remilitarization and domination of the Black Sea tend to go unnoticed and leave the entire southeastern flank of NATO allies exposed to Moscow's harassment. With volatile neighbors and limited ability for power projection outside of periodic NATO Black Sea exercises – the Montreux Convention limiting the stationing of allied ships in the Black Sea – Romania could suffer a hard blow. Romania is unprepared to face a heavily militarized Black Sea, endangering energy and commercial routes and the regional balance of power.

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Blank, "Moscow Begins Building a New Black Sea Fleet," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 22, 2014.



Apart from the offshore energy resources Romania is currently exploring in the Black Sea, one potential ramification of the security crisis could be restricting the markets between the Black Sea ports into the Danube (Sulina, Kiliya, and the Danube-Black Sea canal) and non-EU nations, in particular Turkey. In 2013, these ports made up for slightly less than 27 percent of all the goods transported along the Danube.<sup>3</sup> A stretching of the conflict in eastern Ukraine toward Odessa and finally the Ukrainian side of the Danube Delta could choke this critical artery and cause important losses for the countries using the Danube as a trade access point to the heart of Europe.

## ***Non-kinetic Warfare***

Less obvious in Romania than in other CEE countries, hybrid warfare – aimed at destabilizing domestic politics and weakening pro-American support – is not unknown to Romanian security and expert communities. The unconventional subversion tools that Russia utilizes in Romania include investments in the energy sector that are used to influence economic and political elites; cyberattacks against national security information networks linked to Romania’s foreign policy (such as the 2012 “Red October” cyberattack), natural resources and Black Sea policies; the potential use of intelligence penetration and organized crime as seen in Crimea and Bulgaria to gain control of or leverage over key economic and media sectors, as well as some religious circles and corrupt Romanian political figures, movements, and institutions; and support for ethnical tensions. Already, Romania is the target of a sophisticated and well-funded Russian disinformation campaign through media channels, blogs and cultural organizations, as well as efforts at intelligence penetration to corrupt the Romanian political system.

After the annexation of Crimea, information war and its potential impact on Romanian society and Romania’s system of government have become more salient. However, the multiple dimensions of this threat remain underexplored. A matter of national security, information war remains a domain reserved for the defense and intelligence circles, while political awareness regarding the threats remains limited. Also, there is seemingly little effort to draw into this conversation broader constituencies – such as investigative journalists and bloggers, cyber experts, nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and independent analysts – that could encourage a better assessment of the threats and a more well-thought-out counterstrategy.

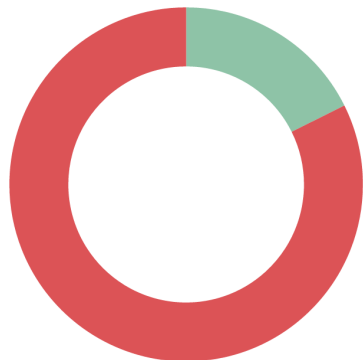
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<sup>3</sup> Danube Commission, “Danube Navigation Statistics for 2012-2013,” <http://www.danubecommission.org/uploads/doc/STATISTIC/Statistics%202012-2013%20Rev%201%20EN.pdf>.

## Inadequate Military Force

Due to its NATO accession in 2004, Romania shaped the reform of its armed forces according to the needs of international missions via power projection mechanisms and therefore neglected its territorial defense. With Russia's ongoing activities in the neighborhood since 2014, Romania's armed forces modernization and the country's ability to defend itself against a growing Russian threat have become issues of concern.

Although its membership in NATO and the EU and its Strategic Partnership with the United States ensure Romania a strong position in southeastern Europe, Romania's challenges in implementing a new approach to national defense are extensive. The country's military ability is weak. Although widely respected both at home and abroad, the Romanian military today reflects post-Cold War strategic realities: small budgets, a preoccupation with out-of-area missions such as International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations and a prioritization of personnel over capabilities. The modernization program that Romania began in 2007 has stalled. Out of 85 planned acquisitions, only 15 have been completed. Some Romanian forces today are using equipment that dates back to the Warsaw Pact era, while defense budget allocations are expected to increase to 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) only in 2017.<sup>4</sup> A quick inventory of challenges include, although are not limited to, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR); armored personnel carriers (APCs) and light armed vehicles; self-propelled artillery; anti-tank weaponry; ground air-defense capabilities; coastal defense and anti-landing capabilities; and logistical support. Apart from territorial defense, Romania's vulnerabilities currently also include an underdeveloped reserve force, limited naval capabilities to secure the Danube and Black Sea areas – with particular relevance for the Danube Delta – and limited investment in technological innovations.



**Out of 85 planned acquisitions, *only 15 have been completed.***

The country is also struggling to curb corruption, increase transparency and fix its weak regulatory framework, all of which have in the past inhibited large investments in the military industry and obstructed technology- and experience-sharing. With little regional integration – apart from limited strategic partnerships with Poland and Turkey – and lacking a well-defined contingency plan, Romania might need a deep rethinking of its defense strategy and planning.<sup>5</sup> If it wants to succeed in the new geopolitical context, the country must play a more direct leadership role than it has in the past in ensuring the stability of the external conditions that provide for its national security as well as sound economic and democratic principles.

<sup>4</sup> Robert K. Ackerman, "Romania Stretches Out Military Modernization," *AFCEA*, March 1, 2014.


<sup>5</sup> Starting in 2012, a strategic dialogue with Poland began at the level of state secretary within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense – with about two rounds of consultations on security per year. A similar dialogue exists with Turkey but only at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs state secretary level. A trilateral dialogue on security with Poland and Turkey at the level of Ministry of Foreign Affairs state secretary in started in 2012, and five rounds of consultations have taken place. A separate parliamentary trilateral dialogue started last year, too.

# Policy Recommendations

The changing geopolitical context of the southeastern regional landscape requires a reassessment of Romania's position, resources and priorities as a 21<sup>st</sup> century security actor. Whereas Russian strategy integrates military, informational, economic and soft power to achieve desired political ends, CEE states have been slower to develop an upgraded national security posture commensurate with the elevated demands of the regional security situation. Romania in the future will have to be more fully attuned to regional security developments, better at assessing and understanding the stratagems at play, and capable of developing a broad spectrum of countermeasures in collaboration with its Western allies. As the second-largest "frontline" NATO state and the largest and most important U.S. ally in southeastern Europe, neither Romania nor the Western Alliance can afford to see Romania fail. To succeed, Romania will need a comprehensive and more assertive security strategy grounded in clear priorities with matching resources to secure its citizens' safety and the stability of its frontiers, and to maintain its positive transformative path.

## 1. *Securing the Black Sea*

To cope with the latest developments in the Black Sea region, Romania needs an upgraded strategic framework that will strengthen its national security through new defense technology development, increased cooperation with NATO allies and neighbors, and cyber defensive and offensive initiatives. This is not a Romanian problem alone, however. A deeper involvement of the United States (National Security Council, State Department and the Pentagon), Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and United States European Command (EUCOM), as well as NATO headquarters, is crucial in each step along the way as policies are developed, particularly in regards to the Black Sea. In particular Romania will need to:

 **Develop A2/AD capabilities.** The annexation of Crimea is shifting the geography of control in the Black Sea region, making it high time for NATO to prepare for scenarios in which Russia is becoming a threat for the regional commons (freedom of navigation and overflight, access to shared spaces). Frontline states should invest together with NATO in layers of anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) platforms capable of securing the cluster of ports, airfields and the whole infrastructure necessary for receiving NATO expeditionary reinforcement forces.

Romania, as well as the other frontline states, should become an A2/AD actor that can be a strong contributor to a counter-intervention capability regarding Russia's actions in the Black Sea. This means developing the ability to deny access to a battlespace via anti-ship, anti-surface and anti-air capabilities, all while protecting critical infrastructure and counterforce assets from tactical ballistic missile attack via air missile defense capabilities. Romania's fellow frontline ally Poland is already moving in this direction. It reflects a new trend in the strategic thinking and capabilities of Russia's neighbors. Countries are moving away from ISAF-style out-of-area operations and are investing instead in A2/AD capabilities that can defend territory and impede aggressors. Romania would benefit from developing similar capabilities for the Black Sea littoral.






➤ **Provide better protection for the Constanta naval base.** To ensure that Romania's crucial maritime infrastructure remains protected, national security leaders should undertake a review of how maritime ports of significance around the world are defended, and then apply those lessons when updating the defenses at Constanta.


➤ **Improve the security partnerships with Poland and Turkey, and enhance relationships with Bulgaria and the Baltic states as well as other NATO partners.** Regarding regional cooperation, Romania and its neighbor NATO allies, in particular Bulgaria and Turkey, need to work together much more closely to enforce the regional strategic dialogue, similar to the strategic partnership Romania has developed with Poland. Such a regional dialogue focused on the Black Sea – which could be framed around Article 3 of the NATO Treaty – could be complemented by joint military exercises, combined intelligence task forces and air and sea patrolling.<sup>6</sup> Non-alliance members such as Ukraine and Georgia can also be engaged in this dialogue framework; despite their lack of a modern and developed infrastructure, the two countries can offer harboring capabilities for controlling maneuvers toward and from Crimea.

<sup>6</sup> In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack. Article 3, *The North Atlantic Treaty*, April 4, 1949, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm)

## 2. *Fighting the hybrid war*

Less exposed to Russian propaganda than other CEE countries are, Romania has increasingly become a target for media disinformation and subversion. With very weak cultural (or political) ties with Russia, part of which originate in a history of enmity between the two countries, most of the tactics employed in Romania are not targeted to create a more favorable image of Russia. Rather, their objective is to undermine the solidity of pro-Western sentiments and confidence in organizations like NATO and the EU. With a relatively weak independent media, Romania can become a fertile ground for Kremlin-endorsed media stories. Already, various fringe websites and blogs are carrying such messages, complemented by the official Russia Today's seemingly very professional news services. While media are most likely to become susceptible to penetration, other vulnerable spots could emerge, for example, instrumentalizing Christian Orthodox affinities; manipulating ethno-nationalist feelings in certain parts of the country; attempts to acquire strategic energy assets using third parties; supporting transnational organized crime networks; and cyberattacks. These tactics have been common in other parts of the region and could soon become more widespread in Romania as well.

 **Elaborate cohesive and comprehensive civil-military response strategies.** To prevent and address low-intensity, non-linear types of subversion or conflict, Romania needs to develop a cohesive strategy and plans to counter unconventional warfare scenarios. To do so, Romanian intelligence and national security officials have to develop stronger analytical capabilities that employ reliable and comprehensive data and information on all types of subversion that Russia is using. Romania needs to carefully identify its domestic vulnerabilities that could be targeted by Russian subversion and prepare a comprehensive response framework. Such a framework would design differentiated actions based on the type of threat and its gravity, and would identify responsible actors within the Romanian government or security structures.

 **Further develop cyber capabilities and improve preparedness to deal with asymmetrical threats.** Another significant point in the new policy is the cyber security aspect. Romania's technological prowess and capabilities are known to be some of Europe's best. Therefore, they have to be developed into robust assets and resources for NATO that could empower intelligence operations, support conventional forces and help in countering measures and managing risks during a cyber incident. Simultaneously, these assets could strengthen the deterrence factor. Using the NATO Human Intelligence Centre of Excellence (HUMINT) in Oradea under the umbrella of the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT) at its full capacity could be the starting point. More funds and equipment for the cybernetic military activities are required – the Romanian Armed Forces must be well prepared to take part in NATO's common endeavor to fight cyberattacks by providing a pool of experts and by procuring the needed equipment. Also needed are more common exercises and simulations with other NATO states.



### 3. *Modernizing the Romanian Armed Forces (RoAF)*

The modernization of the RoAF has to be a systematic process that starts with the assessment of capabilities and targeted priorities, and establishes a strong territorial defense investment and contingency plan (within the NATO framework) and integration with other NATO members or neighbors. This analysis should also aim to reassess security assumptions after the annexation of Crimea in conjunction with the need for continuity in maintaining and developing existing capabilities. If such an establishment was not necessary during the past 25 years, today Romania must enact a unified modernization plan. In particular, in the short term Romania will need to focus on the following issues:

- **Create a new defense modernization framework.** In the short term, Romania should seek to develop a framework for improved capabilities modeled on Poland's defense Technical Modernization Program (TMP). This would include a comprehensive assessment of emerging threats, review of stalled tenders and, most importantly, a revised statement of priorities to guide future defense procurement and research and development.
- **Live up to pledged defense spending increases.** Presently there is a good deal of skepticism about Romania's ability to meet its promised boost in military spending. Leaders can allay this skepticism by accelerating the pace of defense increases and investing them in capabilities that Romania will need to defend its air and maritime approaches from the Black Sea. The new defense planning process should also aim to reassess security assumptions after Ukraine, in conjunction with the need for continuity in maintaining and developing existing capabilities.







#### 4. Reinforcing the Eastern Frontier

Apart from the potential military escalation in southern Ukraine and in the Black Sea, Russia's soft power and subversive actions in both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova eat away at the root of EU efforts for modernization and further integration of the two countries. Romania has been particularly deeply invested in supporting the democratic consolidation of Moldova and more recently the reform processes in Ukraine. Russia's imperialistic tendencies and subversive actions in the region undermine Romania's efforts to stabilize its neighbors and foster a democratic and prosperous vicinity. This has triggered a comprehensive approach by Bucharest to defining national security: Romania's new National Security Strategy mentions frozen conflicts and destabilizing actions (by Russia) in its immediate vicinity as among the main security challenges that the country faces. This is something new and it reflects the changed regional security environment and a heightened apprehension about how tensions in Romania's neighborhood affect its own security and stability. Responding to these challenges will require a diversity of approaches, ranging from diplomatic and political soft power to hard security cooperation.

➤ **Promote within NATO the creation of a contingency plan envisaging a potential Russian move on Odessa and then on the connecting corridor to southern Ukraine and Transnistria.** Such a plan could include, among other actions, constant air patrolling of the Romanian frontier, common training with Moldovan military forces and Romanian-Moldovan task forces trained to tackle potential popular disturbances in the regions bordering Romania.

➤ **Promote within the EU a revised Eastern Partnership (EaP) that would strengthen the prospect of further European integration for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, while increasing stability in the region.** Romania should assume a stronger role in supporting an EaP that would increase economic and political ties between its neighbors to the east and the EU. Romania needs to work together with other EU member states in the CEE region to promote good governance and thus address the root causes of these nations' vulnerability in the face of Russian aggression, in particular corruption. A revised EaP set of policies might also include a strong component addressing the information war and the use of various propaganda tactics that are likely to manipulate ethnic tensions. To that end, of crucial importance is maintaining a political discourse based on integration under a European reform agenda that would leave no room for ethno-irredentist interpretations that Moscow could easily speculate about.





# Conclusion

These recommendations reflect the realities of the changing geopolitical context in the CEE region, and many of them require new capabilities – and indeed, a new mindset in Romania’s thinking about its potential as a national security actor. Recognizing Romania’s unique status as a politically reliable, strategically situated Atlanticist state possessing substantial regional leadership potential, the recommendations in this policy brief should help ensure greater Romanian national defense capabilities and enhanced Romanian security in NATO’s southeastern flank. Painful and time-consuming though many of these recommendations may be to achieve, the alternative is to show a lack of leadership that would imperil Romania and subject it to the ripple effects of a deteriorating regional security landscape. If Romania doesn’t start taking the necessary steps, its investment in securing peace and stability in the Black Sea region and in preserving its own democratic and economic developments will become steadily less certain in coming years as Russia’s revisionist agenda for the region gathers pace. With the right strategy and investment, and building on the transatlantic security partnerships, Romania can become a security provider and a role model in southeast Europe.





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