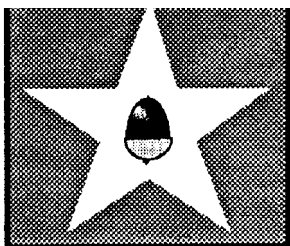# Conflict Studies Research Centre

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In The Shadow Of Russia: Romania's Relations With Moldova And Ukraine

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IN THE SHADOW OF RUSSIA: ROMANIA'S RELATIONS WITH MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE

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INTRODUCTION

The break-up of the former Soviet Union, the uneven pace of change in the post-communist world, and the growing fluidity within the European Union make it impossible to predict the future shape of "Europe" and the new dividing line between "Central Europe" and "Eastern Europe". To a great extent, the so-called "Lands in Between" was a state of mind shared by captive nations which believed that there were too many Russians (until communism collapsed) or too many Germans (especially, but not only, when Hitler was on the rampage). Today, the land between Central and Eastern Europe, between Russia and Germany, Europe and Asia, East and West, seems more easily perceived by what it is not, than by what it is. Indeed, this is not an area fully integrated into NATO and the EU but a frontier region in the shadow of Russia's influence and Germany's interest, a region which although it is part of Europe, is on the edge of it. The main reasons why it is currently so difficult to define are on one hand because of the fluidity caused by the two great clubs, the EU and NATO, tugging so may countries of this region into their embrace and, on the other hand, because of Russia's uncertain future. The map, in this respect, is changing rapidly, with Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary already inside the military alliance, and with a group of countries, including the more advanced trio, edging at various speeds towards the EU. However, the connotation of "Eastern Europe" remains, to a large extent, a place where people want to forget their geography and to become part of the "European values" of democracy, free market economy and not least, stability and security.

Geographically, Romania and its north-eastern neighbours, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, are situated in this region considered to be, after the collapse of Soviet Union, what Martin Wight[1] called a "buffer zone" characterised by political instability, economic disarray and " a security vacuum". Clearly, geography alone does not determine the fate of nations - even though no less a figure than Napoleon Bonaparte went so far as to assert that "the policy of a state lies in its geography". Nevertheless, geography does provide an important context within which foreign policy is weighted and considered. Historically, Romania's relations with the countries of this land derived from the region's unfavourable geography, historical inheritance and politics, or in other words from their geostrategic location between more powerful and expansionist neighbours: Germany to the west and Russia to the east. Indeed, it was Germany's defeat in the First World War that made possible the accomplishment of "Greater Romania" in December 1918.   And it was the consequences of a German-Russian secret agreement known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939, that led to the seizure of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina and the creation by Russia in 1940 of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldavia. Today, this area is shared by Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and if in Romanian eyes these territories are *"sacred Romanian lands"*, for the Ukrainians they remain *"ancient Ukrainian lands"* that Ukraine had helped to *"liberate from foreign rule".* [2]

With the end of the Cold War order, many countries throughout the world, in their search for a return to their "greater" past, began developing new relations and reinvigorating old antagonisms and affiliations. Politicians invoke and publics perceive as "greater", cultural communities that transcend nation state boundaries, identified in the past by "Greater Germany" and "Greater Hungary" in Central Europe, "Greater Romania" in East Central Europe and "Greater Russia" in Eastern Europe, to enumerate only a few. But will future political and economic alignments

always coincide with those of culture and civilisation? According to Samuel Huntington [3] the answer to this question is a categorical no, because the present balance-of-power considerations would lead to cross-civilisational alliances. However, in spite of official denials, many states, East and West alike, are worried about the revival of "greater nations". On one hand, Putin's more assertive Russian foreign policy could induce a postponement of the existing process of Euro-Atlantic integration and expansion, and could even contribute in some conditions to the revival of "Greater Russia", a redrawn East European map and the end of the present status quo in this region. On the other hand, more than a few people in Europe and abroad surely felt unease when they read that *"Germany is again... one of the leading states in the world"*, unease about the possibility of Germany relapsing into its old, self-centred, egocentric and nationalist persona.[4]

But so far, the end of the Cold War has not yet been followed by a return to fluid patterns of multipolarity characteristic of the inter-war period and based on balance-of-power politics. Instead, a new concept of Europe has emerged, with the main European powers adopting a largely consensual and collaborative approach to the problems of maintaining peace and stability on the continent. The reasons behind this new approach are very complex and varied, and have to do with the changing character of European relations in an era of interdependence, globalisation, institutional integration and democratisation. Today, the main threat to peace and security in this region comes not from inter-state war but from conflicts internal to states that could degenerate into new conflicts at the periphery of "civilised Europe".

These security risks arise from two associated processes in Eastern Europe: the upheavals generated by the process of post-communist transition, and a revival of nationalism. With the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a process of democratisation, the risk of ethnic and other related forms of intercommunal strife has emerged as one of the most pressing security concerns of the new Europe. And while the Balkan conflict seems to be more or less contained, the next European "hot spot" of instability and conflict is likely to be nearer to Russian's western border, in the region known as Bessarabia and Bukovina, at the junction of Romania, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Indeed, post-communist developments at Romania's north-eastern border and this country's relations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova are becoming once again a critical point of instability not only because of their complex post-communist dynamics but also because of their strategic European dimension. The EU and NATO's enlargement processes, and the future Russian approach to the unsolved problems of this area could make or break the present security equilibrium.

So far, the political-military and economic relations among the three countries of this region span a spectrum ranging from genuine collaboration to open hostility, exhibiting elements of continuity and change with the partial re-emergence of historical patterns of cooperation and conflict. These contradictory trends are not unexpected if we bear in mind that since the fall of the Berlin Wall this region has been confronted with the whole range of negative and positive aspects of the post-communist transition. To enumerate only a few, these problems stretched from the disintegration of the USSR empire and a quasi-stable security to independence, nation-building and instability; from peace in the communist era to war in Transdniestria; from foreign troop occupation to nationalism, separatism and unionism; and from a centralised economy and economic deadlock to democratic reforms and a commitment to EU integration and cooperation with NATO. In spite of all these difficulties, or perhaps because of them, since the end of the Cold War

new patterns of bilateral relations and multilateral cooperation, rooted in these countries' distinctive regional identity and contradictions, have emerged and developed mainly as a result of Romania's initiatives.

The force behind Romania's initiatives in this region could be assessed, at first sight, as being the prospect of a swift integration into NATO and the EU in a forthcoming second wave of enlargement. But as Romania's prospects of Euro-Atlantic integration are far from certain, to what extent is Bucharest's active eastern foreign policy focused on building security bridges with its eastern neighbours or, indeed, are we witnessing a shrewd diplomacy towards a revival of a more compliant foreign policy to Russia's influence and interests in the region?

This question could become even more relevant in the context of ongoing debates on the future of NATO's enlargement process and the EU's quandary over a deeper or wider new Europe, which makes future expansions, if at all, more likely to be postponed towards the end of the decade. Meanwhile, Romania is still economically and politically unstable, its democracy is not yet irreversible and its ethnicity is still mainly combustive. The surprising decision of President Constantinescu not to stand as a candidate for a new mandate in this year's November general elections, as well as his accusations against Bucharest's political elite and their "limitless" corruption are other sufficient elements to question Romania's democratic credentials.[5]

HISTORICAL PATTERNS OF COOPERATION AND CONFLICT

History of Romania's Eastern Borders

For many in Romania, in the Republic of Moldova and in Ukraine - as in other former communist countries - the past lives on in the present in a very tangible way: myths and legends continue to exert a powerful influence on political behaviour, and many people continue to identify with their historical forbears. Attempting to understand current political debates without taking into consideration the geostrategical importance and historical background of Romania, Moldova and Ukraine is therefore extremely difficult. Although the past does not - and never can - provide a guide to the future, it does help us understand the cultural perspectives and geopolitical assumptions of these actors.

In this context it is worth mentioning that Wallachia (future south-eastern Romania), Bessarabia and Bukovina (present-day Moldova and south Ukraine) were settled in the 13th century by Vlachs/Romanians from Transylvania and were governed as a vassal - first by Poland from 1387 and after 1455 by the Ottomans - or by local leaders (voivodes) who were strong enough to become independent rulers. In the 16th century, Ottoman influence over Moldova, and Polish dominance in Ukraine were complete. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Ottoman Empire was forced out of much of the Danubian basin by Habsburg Austria. As for tributary states, the Ottomans lost Transylvania permanently, but held on Moldova up to the river Dniester and most of Wallachia. At the beginning of the 18th century the autonomous political status of both Wallachia and Moldova was reduced. In 1711 in Moldova, and in 1715 in Wallachia, locally elected princes were replaced by Ottoman appointees drawn largely from Greek (Phanariot) families in Istanbul. During the second half of the 17th century, Poland managed to keep the Right Bank Ukraine (west of the Dnieper) but was unable to recover lands further east ceded in

wars with Muscovy/Russia. In essence, Poland's eastern boundary established in 1667-1686, which gave Kyiv, the left-bank Ukraine (east of the Dnieper) and Zaporozhia to Muscovy, was to remain in effect throughout most of the 18th century.

Historical Provinces Of Romania

The boundaries of 19th century Europe were set in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna. In Eastern Europe, the greatest gains were made by Prussia, Russia and Austria. Austria acquired Galicia and northern Bukovina. Russia's main territorial gain came along its western frontier, where a Polish state was restored in the form of the Kingdom of Poland. As for the Ottoman Empire, the close of the Napoleonic era and the Congress of Vienna brought, with minor exceptions, no boundary changes. However, the Danubian province of Moldova (minus Bessarabia) and Wallachia were restored to the Ottomans by the Russian Empire, which had occupied them from 1806 to 1812.

The modern Romanian state originated in the 1859 unification of the Ottoman principalities of Moldova and Wallachia under Prince Alexander Ioan Cuza. The new state, which comprised only a part of the Romanian population, obtained formal independence in 1878. The political elite, being unable to govern because of internal party conflicts, invited a German aristocrat to be their king and Romania became a kingdom three years later. Three million Romanians remained in Hungarian-ruled Transylvania, about two million in Russian-controlled Bessarabia, and smaller groups in Dobrudja, in Bulgaria. The Romanian kingdom's overriding political goal was the union of all Romanian-inhabited lands into Romania Mare (Greater Romania).

This was achieved temporarily at the end of the First World War, as of the states that existed in Central Europe before the war, Romania gained the most territory in the years after 1918. The Moldovan republic in Bessarabia, which declared its independence from Russia at the end of 1917, voted to join Romania in April 1918,

with which they had strong cultural and historic ties. Farther north, a Romanian popular Assembly meeting in former Austrian Bukovina called for union with Romania on October 28, 1918. At the end of the First World War, the victorious allies endorsed Romania's acquisitions of Dobrudja (in 1913), Bessarabia, northern Bukovina and Transylvania as an anti-Soviet barrier. Following the confirmation of these new acquisitions by the Treaty of Versailles (1919) and the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Romania doubled in size but failed to integrate the new regions culturally or to develop them economically. Lack of Western support for Ukrainian self-determination allowed the incorporation of eastern Ukraine into the Soviet Union in 1920 and the western part of the country into Poland in 1918. Needless to say, the reunification of Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia within "Greater Romania" was never recognised by Ukraine, Russia or the Soviet Union. [6]

In the inter-war years, regional relations were dominated by a balance-of-power logic and the big powers' political considerations. Regional cooperation barely existed during the 1920s and 1930s, and was dominated by irredentist disputes and nationalist rivalries. Even before the outbreak of World War II, in September 1939 Hitler managed to secure an agreement with Stalin, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty, whose secret protocols provided for the division of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union in the event of war. As a result, Romania was forced to accede to the Soviet Union's demands of 26 June 1940 for northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, incorporated immediately within the USSR as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). Under the same pact, western Ukraine was also allocated to the Soviet sphere of influence and invaded by Soviet forces in 1940. Meanwhile, the 1940 German-dictated Vienna Treaty awarded northern Transylvania to Hungary. But whereas Transylvania was returned entirely to Romanian control at the end of the Second World War, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, including Hertsa district, remained both a Soviet republic and a source of intense Romanian grievance. Consequently, more than 40% of the territory of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina annexed by the Soviets from Romania in 1940 currently belongs to Ukraine. Part of southern Bessarabia now constitutes the southern extension of Odessa oblast, making Ukraine riparian to the Danube, but driving a wedge between Moldova and the Danube, and also denying Moldova an outlet to the Black Sea. The most northerly part of Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and Romania's Hertsa province were amalgamated to form Chernovtsy oblast, now also part of Ukraine. The remaining part is now the present-day Republic of Moldova. In contrast with the Baltic States, the fate of Moldova and western Ukraine, definitively annexed by the Soviet Union in 1944, was accepted with relative equanimity by the West. The situation at Romania's eastern border remained unchanged during the Cold War, as the Soviet Union prevented the development of autonomous and organic regional relations within Eastern Europe.[7]

Modern Moldova consists of two parts: the former territory of Bessarabia between the Prut and Dniester rivers, which belonged to Romania for much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the Transdniestrian region, which czarist Russia claimed in the early 19th century. The tension deriving from these two opposing influences has obviously played a major role in shaping Moldova's history. As already mentioned, the two regions merged to form the Moldovian SSR in 1940 following the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact that ceded a substantial proportion of Romanian territory to the Soviet Union. During the 20th century, "Russification" proved exceptionally heavy, even by Soviet standards, as the Soviet leaders attempted to wipe out all historical and cultural links with Romania. The Cyrillic script replaced the Latin alphabet, and the name of the language changed from Romanian to

Moldavian. Soviet authorities also relied on heavy immigration into Moldova from the Russian and Ukrainian SSRs to further distinguish the republic from Romania.

The policy of *glasnost',* begun in 1986 by the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, fostered the emergence of independent political groups seeking national and cultural independence. In September 1989 the Communist Party of Moldova yielded to popular pressure by reintroducing the Latin script and re-establishing Moldavian as the official language in place of Russian. Following an election in February 1990, deputies sympathetic to the nationalist cause began to dominate the Supreme Soviet (parliament). In April 1990 it elected as its chairman Mircea Snegur, a deputy backed by the country's largest pro-independence group, the Popular Front of Moldova. The reform process accelerated a month later with the appointment of a reform-minded prime minister, Mircea Druc. Full independence was achieved on August 27th 1991, soon after the abortive Moscow coup. In December 1991 Moldovans elected Snegur as the republic's first president.

After the December 1989 revolution in Romania, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the revival of national identities in the region the problem of ethnicity and historical inheritance came to the fore once again. In spite of geographical similarities, there is considerable variation across this region in ethnic composition. Romania's ethnolinguistic distribution shows, for instance, a clear-cut demarcation between the Romanians and Ukrainians/Russians in northern Bukovina and eastern Bessarabia. But although Romania considers that there are still over 400,000 ethnic Romanians in Ukraine's Bukovina, according to the 1989 official Ukrainian census there are only 135,000 ethnic Romanians clustered around the present Romanian-Moldovan-Ukrainian border. In the Republic of Moldova, with a population of 4.3 million, the Moldovans - the titular group after the country's 1991 independence - represent some 65%, while Ukrainians are 14% and Russians 13% of the population. But whether or not the language spoken by most Moldovans (a dialect of Romanian) constitutes a separate language, and whether or not their national identity could be defined within the border of the newly created Republic of Moldova remain a subject of ongoing political controversy and a future source of instability and conflict. [8]

Thus, the end of the Cold War and the changes set in motion in 1989 have not been restricted to the transformation of the political and socio-economic orders of individual states or to re-evaluation of their status within a broader Europe and in relations with the West. They also affected relations between states within the region, as well as the lines of ethnic division that run within and across those sovereign territories. As a result, Romania's relations with its north-eastern neighbours Ukraine and Moldova and the people that live within this territory became once again a subject of considerable uncertainty.

Post-Communist Historical Continuity and Geopolitical Change

The contemporary pattern of regional relations at Romania's eastern border contains elements of both historical continuity and geopolitical change. The collapse of the socialist bloc brought about the end of ideological barriers which divided East and West, while the emergence of Ukraine as an independent and sovereign state and as a major power in the region was considered by many analysts as the most significant geostrategic development in Europe since the end of World War II. As we begin the 21st century, there is an almost universal consensus on the importance of a system of governance based around pluralistic democracy and the need for an economic system which combines efficiency and growth with

equity and human security. Ten years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, only three of the former Communist states have passed the transition stage and are well on their way to full Euro-Atlantic integration. The other former Communist countries are still reeling from their post-socialist experiences, where transition has lacked consistency and the devastation of authoritarian rule has left society deeply wounded and divided. For the time being, these countries' tenacity in striving to rejoin Europe is matched only by their will to be recognised as rightful members of the European community.

But with the end of communism and the collapse of bipolarity, a new "concert of Europe" has sprung up, which represents a fundamentally different international arrangement to that of the Cold War. The new patterns of regional relations in the former communist countries often draw substance from historical precedents, and build on a shared sense of regional identity. First of all, these inter-state relations represent an attempt to heal the East-West divide and to develop new forms of cooperation and integration. Second, they reflect the multidimensionality of the integration process in Europe, which involves a variety of mechanisms for intergovernmental consultation, policy harmonisation and functional cooperation. Third, bi- and multi-lateral relations provide the new post-communist democracies with valuable experience of multilateral cooperation, as a transitional step towards full membership to the EU and NATO.

However, the search for security remains a paramount concern for all the states of this region. In the absence of any form of security guarantees, the question of national minorities - which is no longer as intense and emotive as it was in the inter-war years - and arbitrarily drawn borders represent potential areas of conflict over minority rights and unresolved irredenta. It is true that the removal of the two superpowers' influence from the European security system has given the opportunity to the former communist countries of framing anew their national security and defence policies. They are doing so in the context of a fundamentally changed international environment. Indeed, on the one hand, NATO and the EU countries' approach to Eastern Europe has changed dramatically from ignorance through involvement to advocating integration. These organisations have opened the doors and pledged that they would remain open to all other countries interested in joining, while Russia has embarked on the rocky road of democratisation, market economy and cooperation with the West. On the other hand, NATO and the EU's doors turned out to be very closely guarded, while Russia became the "sick man of Europe". Today, while western Europeans are debating the EU and NATO's future, the newly elected president of Russia has the unenviable mission of sorting out outstanding difficulties, as this country's economy is in dire straits, its national identity is uncertain and contested, while its foreign policy could become once again more assertive and based on old-fashioned Realpolitik concepts. These less benign developments are still creating considerable unease, and many former communist states are extremely worried by the newly assertive Russian foreign policy and by the West's obvious desire to find a common language with the new Russian leader.

In spite of the existing setbacks, Romania, Ukraine and Moldova's determination to "rejoin Europe", to be part of Western organisations and multilateral institutions, reflects these countries' commitment to the European norms and values of democracy and human rights, liberalism, tolerance of national minorities, the peaceful resolution of disputes and a willingness to reach compromise and consensus. And indeed, the prospect of joining the other three East-Central European countries in an expanded European Union and NATO is much closer now. But bearing in mind their common history and communist inheritance, to

what extent would their post-communist relations and future cooperation help in achieving their aim when the risks and threats to their regional security are still very complex and difficult to overcome?

Risks and Threats to Regional Security

The situation at Romania's eastern borders remains one of the most complex cases for regional security analysis. This is because it is unclear into which regions this territory should be divided: where does Europe end, where does Asia end? Is there a Russia-centred sphere that includes most of the post-Soviet countries (the CIS) and is there a Central Asian security complex? More than that, in this area where the new states are fragile projects, their democracies are still in their infancy and their degree of autonomy in relation to Russia is equally uncertain, the main aspects of societal, political and military security are closely linked. Based on the security models developed by Barry Buzan[9] three categories of threats and dangers to the region's security could be identified in Bessarabia-Bukovina, in which Romania, Ukraine and Moldova are equally involved:

1. Non-military threats and dangers:
   - political instability and economic deadlock as a result of lack of structural reforms and democratisation of existing institutions;
   - hostile political-diplomatic pressures to discredit and isolate the newly independent states of Ukraine and Moldova in the context of a more assertive Russia and less democratic Romania;
   - a complex of aggression by the use and manipulation of mass-media aimed to influence political circles and public opinion in a direction contrary to Ukraine and Moldova's national interests;
   - organised crime, arms and drugs trafficking over permeable borders, corruption and social chaos, used by hostile powers to control and destabilise the region;
   - the substitution of military threat with aggressive financial-economic and technological threats combined with energy dependence on Russia aimed to blackmail the young democracies of Ukraine and Moldova, and not only them.

2. Atypical forms of violence and instabilities:
   - inter-ethnic conflicts as a result of the population structure and as a result of the Transdniestrian conflict and separatist tendencies of the Russophone population. This is a very complex issue which should take into consideration all nationalist centrifugal forces, including Romania's historical view on Bessarabia and Bukovina;
   - subversive actions to disorganise and destabilise the region through terrorist-political methods and aimed at gaining political advantage for existing Mafia-style and parallel centres of power;
   - financial and military support to secessionist forces in parallel with actions of sabotage and destabilisation of the Armed Forces.

3. Military risks and dangers:
   - the existence of some 2,000 soldiers and over 40,000 tonnes of military equipment and ammunition of the former 14th Russian Army on Moldovan territory in the self-proclaimed Transdniestrian Republic;

- local military confrontation within the Transdniestrian Republic facilitated by the existence of a secessionist government ready to use existing military potential in order to prevent incorporation by Chisinau;
- local regional war involving Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia as a result of convergent risks and dangers combined with favourable political-military-nationalistic conditions.

It is, however, clear that the present dangers are both internal and external to the states in the region, where the internal dangers are probably more important, although the external ones should not be neglected. The most dangerous external risks come from the Transdniestrian conflict.

Present Developments in the Transdniestrian Conflict

The still unresolved Transdniestrian problem and the existence of a military base on Moldova's territory (even if in the self-proclaimed Transdniestrian Republic) represent one of the main external dangers to the region as a whole. Although Moldova has been recognised as an independent state in 1991, ethnic, economic and political instability has raised doubts over its future existence. The volatile Transdniestrian region of Moldova has exacerbated these fears.

The Transdniestrian region, a predominantly Slav enclave to the east of the Dniester River with its large population of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, saw Moldovan independence as an ominous first step towards re-unification with Romania and voted for autonomy from Moldova in September 1990 - and for independence in late 1991. With a Moldovan government refusing to recognise the region's aspirations, civil war erupted in January 1992. The Russian 14th Army stationed in the region played a leading role in supplying arms to Transdniestria's separatists, while Moldova received support from Romania. By the time a cease-fire emerged in July 1992 with the assistance of Ukraine and Russia, the separatists had won control over the whole region and the west-bank town of Teghina. Since then, Transdniestria has pursued its own policies under the draconian rule of its president, Igor Smirnov, and has enjoyed quasi-independence including its own currency, central bank and customs posts, as well as adherence to the Cyrillic alphabet. According to the July 1992 cease-fire agreement, the demarcation line was to be maintained by a tripartite peacekeeping force composed of Moldovan, Russian, and Transdniestrian forces. Moscow also agreed to withdraw its 14th Army if a suitable constitutional provision were made for Transdniestria, including a special status within Moldova and the right to secede if Chisinau decided to reunite with Romania.

Diplomatic efforts since the cease-fire agreement have achieved little, given that the Transdniestrian leadership, encouraged by Moscow, sees no incentive to relinquish its well-entrenched control and power. Indeed, after Russia and Moldova signed an agreement in October 1994 on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transdniestria, the Russian government balked at ratifying it, and another stalemate ensued. As a result, the political status of Transdniestria is still not agreed upon. Moldova has offered autonomy but the leaders in Tiraspol are pushing for a confederation. Disagreement remains, providing a potential hotbed for future conflict and emphasising the insecurities of the region. If conflict sparks again, the weak Moldovan economic and political systems could crumble under the pressure and Slavic fears may then be realised. Moreover, to add to this problem, Gagauz Yery - a small region in the south of Moldova, adjacent to Transdniestria and populated by approximately 150,000 Turkish Christians - was granted the

status of an autonomous territorial unit within the Republic of Moldova in January 1995. But in the event of a change to Moldova's status, Gagauz Yery secured the right to full self-determination, a measure designed to protect this area should Moldova ever seek greater integration with Romania.[10]

The history of negotiations for the withdrawal of the Russian army group from Moldova's eastern enclave of Transdniestria before and after the 1994 agreement could be assessed as a perpetuum mobile of promises by Russia to Moldovan officials. Not even the "extensive" Moldova-Russia bilateral protocol on military cooperation that allows Russia to rapidly use force, if necessary, signed in February 1995, was able to determine the State Duma in Moscow to ratify the agreement on Transdniestria. The Russians put forward just one pre-condition, formulated in different terms - legitimacy for Transdniestria. However, during 1997, after further negotiations with Russia, Moldovan diplomats considered they had obtained a "great victory" by managing to secure Moscow's decision to "synchronise" the withdrawal of their troops with the settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict. In reality it was a defeat that did not leave much room for further negotiations. The lid was closed by the "diplomatic mission" of Yevgeny Primakov, who "unlocked" the signature of the memorandum on normalisation of ties between Chisinau and Tiraspol by suggesting a "common state". It later transpired that both sides had substantially different interpretations of this concept.

In spite of more negotiations nothing happened until the November 1999 OSCE summit in Istanbul. According to the Istanbul resolution, Russia must withdraw its Transdniestria-based army group and weaponry before the end of 2002. Russia agreed to the decision and deadline, but as always under some conditions. No wonder that General Roman Hormoza, deputy chief of the OSCE mission to Moldova, on 5 January 2000 said the OSCE was *"worried"* by Russia's decision to link the evacuation of its military arsenal from Transdniester with a political settlement on the special status of the separatist republic within Moldova. Hormoza said Russia's stance was *"unjustified"* bearing in mind the arsenal that was left in Transdniestria after the evacuation of the former 14th Army. According to OSCE data, at the beginning of 2000 there were still 199 tanks, 130 fighter armoured vehicles, 130 artillery units, 77 combat support helicopters and ammunition, in total some 20 tons of military equipment for every one of the 2,000 Russian soldiers left behind in Transdniestria. Hormoza described the ratio as *"unmatched in any other military contingent in the world"* and acknowledged that the OSCE was also worried by the position of the Transdniester separatists, who do not accept the agreement reached at the Istanbul summit.[11]

After Boris Yel'tsin left the scene, Chisinau's illusion of a faster settlement was refuelled by his successor, Vladimir Putin, who although he confirmed his commitment to Transdniestria, continued to reiterate the old Russian promises and conditions. Putin's attitude did not come as a surprise to many Moldovans, especially to the ones that did not forget a declaration made some four years ago by the Transdniestrian security minister, Vadim Shevtsov. Shevtsov, then a KGB colleague of Putin, was quoted as saying in a Chisinau-based publication that Chisinau-Tiraspol talks would last for 20-30 years because the self-proclaimed Transdniestrian Republic was not an end in itself, but *"a means to ensure the security of our people and Bessarabia's people".[12]*

Nevertheless, President Putin, "burdened with care" for constitutional norms regarding the neutrality of Moldova and the impossibility of maintaining or building a military base there, stated during his first visit to Chisinau in June 2000 that

Moscow would *"tend"* to respect the OSCE resolution on unconditional pullout from the tiny republic, but *"first, all citizens, including residents of Transdniestria, must feel safe".* Obviously, Putin was not talking about the Moldovans harassed by Shevtsov's KGB-style security service or about the members of the so-called "Ilascu group" jailed by Tiraspol since 1992 on charges of terrorism. He was talking about Russia's future strategic interests in this region and the need, under OSCE pressure to withdraw his troops, to change military dominance for economic supremacy and political manipulation. It is important to mention, however, as a positive and encouraging element, that speaking to the press after a meeting with his Moldovan counterpart Petru Lucinschi, Putin pointed out that *"in the Transdniestrian issue we shall take into consideration decisions of international organisations and the Moldovan constitution".* He also stated that *"Russia is interested that Moldova be a sovereign, independent and territorially integral state",* but he did not forget to stress once again that this could not be achieved *"without counting the interests of all groups in society, including Transdniestria's residents."*[13] President Putin suggested that if Moldova raised Russian to a second state language, Moscow would cease supporting Transdniestria.[14] Russia's new foreign policy concept seeks to *"obtain guarantees for the rights and freedoms of compatriots"* and *"to develop comprehensive ties with them and their organizations."* Currently, the State Duma is drafting a bill on the status of the Russian language in the CIS.

In spite of the old connotations, the results of Putin's visit to Chisinau could be considered important and far-reaching. Indeed, the Russian and the Moldovan presidents agreed to set up a joint working group charged with the settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict. And because the Moldovans were unable to defuse the "common state" time bomb set by former Russian premier and KGB director Yevgeny Primakov, Putin decided to appoint Primakov, now one of his closest allies, as head of the working group in charge of "accelerating" the finding of a solution to the Transdniestrian conflict. Moreover, Petru Lucinschi confirmed after the talks that full transfer under the OSCE aegis of all peacekeeping units deployed in Transdniestria was not ruled out either, but the final status of their presence in the region would be the subject of additional discussions. The separatist Transdniestrian leader, Igor Smirnov, who was not received by Putin during the visit, stated that *"unless legal guarantees of security have been provided and agreements with Moldova ratified, the withdrawal of the Russian contingent from the region is out of the question".* And to make sure the message was well received by Putin, he organised a meeting in Tiraspol under the motto "Together with Russia for Eternity".[15]

Although at first sight there was no horse trading for Russia's commitment to withdraw its troops from Transdniestria, it became apparent in the aftermath of Putin's visit that Moldova would get cheaper gas ($50 instead of $60 per 1,000 cubic metres) from Gazprom in exchange for a commitment to pay back all the existing debts. By the end of June, Moldova transferred to Russia's Gazprom $90 million in state bonds with options to buy into the country's newly privatised sectors of the economy. The remainder of the $750 million debt would be paid in the same way over the next 7 years. The change in Russia's emphasis from military to economic influence and dominance in the region is there to be seen. What seems to be at stake now is no longer the withdrawal of the Russian troops - which sooner or later are going to be withdrawn under OSCE pressure - but the future of Russia's geopolitical influence and the status of this region.

Following Putin's visit to Chisinau, Russia was quick to present to the OSCE Standing Council in Vienna on 18 July a draft timetable on military withdrawal from the separatist enclave, indicating that the operation is to end by 2002 in line with the resolution of the OSCE Istanbul summit. But according to Vasile Sturdza, chief of the Moldovan delegation to the OSCE, the Russian Federation tried during the discussions to *"trade"* the obligatory withdrawal of its troops and weapons from eastern Moldova for *"the settlement of the conflict between Chisinau and Tiraspol".* Sturdza also pointed out that Russia's draft timetable does not mention *"one word about the date when the withdrawal must begin",* while Russia's plan to transfer a part of the weapons to its peacekeeping forces in Transdniestria was rejected by the OSCE.[16]

Thus, despite the concerted efforts of the Russian, Moldovan, Ukrainian and OSCE mediatory services, the Transdniestrian conflict is becoming more and more complicated. Moreover, it is no secret that the Transdniestrian region, with its geographical position at the crossing of important trade routes, is a big trans-shipment camp for cigarette, spirits and oil smuggling and for money laundering. The obscure legislation of the unrecognised republic is an excellent soil for all kinds of shadowy transactions. These activities are ruinous for the budgets of Moldova and Ukraine, but there are people close to the leadership of these countries who are utterly uninterested in resolving the Transdniestrian conflict and in restoring order at its customs and border-crossing stations. Therefore, besides the political price of the conflict, there is also an economic price. It is not surprising that many foreign diplomats working in Chisinau are inclined to believe that the Transdniestrian problem can be settled for a certain sum of American dollars. And the dollars are not missing, as the OSCE secured in the last few years from the EU and NATO countries as well as from international organisations some 100 million dollars for the withdrawal of Russian troops and weapons. Although there could be a little bit of truth in this belief, things are not that simple.

Indeed, a solution requires most of all a political will. Moldovan President Petru Lucinschi or his successor (the next Moldovan presidential elections are due to take place at the end of 2000), must demonstrate more resolution here. But probably as are important for Moldova is the conclusion of a basic political treaty with Romania, in which the principle of the inviolability of borders be stipulated and approved by both parliaments. It is no secret that the Transdniestrian leaders expertly play the card of their opposition to Moldova's possible unification with Romania. For them, this is an important instrument in favour of consolidation of Transdniestrian statehood. That is why, in the shadow of Moscow, which remains the dominating factor in the region, Romania's future relations with Moldova and Ukraine and the peaceful settlement in Bessarabia and Bukovina could play a vital role in the geopolitical stability of this region.

BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL REGIONAL RELATIONS

Given the historical animosities and the fragile domestic political situation in all three states of this conflict-prone area, developing regional cooperation at Romania's north-eastern border was not an easy task. As Neal Ascherson has written, this Black Sea shore is a region deeply scarred by *"the mysteries of nationalism and identity, with all their shameless games with shadows and mirrors and their enormous creative power".[17]* The end of the Cold War has generated a variety of new forms of bilateral and multilateral Euro-regional political, economic

and military cooperation, dubbed by Bailes *"Cinderellas of European security"*[18] which are very significant for this part of the world. Indeed, Romania's relations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova could be considered, first of all, a manifestation of the process of regional differentiation and integration that has become evident throughout Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Second, they reflect the multi-dimensionality of the integration process in Europe. While the EU has long been at the forefront of European integration, the integration process itself has generated wider forms of cooperation and multilateralism. These have involved a variety of mechanisms for bi- and multi-lateral governmental consultation, policy harmonisation and functional cooperation, often at a local and regional level. Thirdly, participation in regional cooperation provided the new post-communist democracies with valuable experience of multilateral cooperation. And finally, these relations are a prime example of what have been called by Bailes *"international regimes"*, regimes that could change the context within which states act and define their interests. They could help build consensus and identify areas of common interests between states, and ultimately, they could make or break the fragile post-communist security stability.

In Romania, the collapse of Communism raised the population's aspirations and desires to pursue the "Western ideal". The West was associated with prosperity, wealth, freedom, and everything that had been concealed, prevented, or restricted in Romania under Communism. But it is well known that the nations that have done best in overcoming their Communist heritage are those that opted for a quick and complete political, economic and social reform. Since the fall of Communism, Romania has managed only partial reforms and although the central command economy has gone, the rule of law has not been established to make a real market economy work. These half-reforms have given birth to powerful, corrupt elites that in turn have an interest in blocking completion of the reform process. As a result, Romania's first ten years of post-communist evolution were doomed by its legacy of authoritarian rule, statism and corruption, extremism and inter-ethnic rivalry rooted in the turmoil that has marked this country's history for centuries. Political instability, social unrest and economic disarray did not help Romania to overcome its communist inheritance. The duplicity of the post-communist political elite and the lack of radical economic and social reforms did not help either.

However, the replacement of ex-communist President Ion Iliescu by Emil Constantinescu in the November 1996 elections marked a turning point in Romania's political culture and changed the West's attitudes towards this country. Under Constantinescu, the young democracy in Romania managed to overcome extremely serious economic, social, political and security threats coming from within the state rather than from outside. Moreover, Romania is now in line for NATO membership in 2002, and has recently received permission to join accession talks for the second round of EU expansion, which could take place by 2007. But President Constantinescu proved unable to fight against high-level corruption and old-communist infrastructure. His recent decision not to seek re-election in this year's November elections could, in spite of the initial surprise, bring about a more democratically-orientated government. But a return of the neo-communists led by former president Ion Iliescu will doom Romania's prospects of NATO and EU integration, as the country will continue to remain in the shadow of Moscow for the foreseeable future.

To what extent have Romania's relations with Moldova and Ukraine helped to overcome the historical and communist inheritance and to built new bridges to decrease the political instability and insecurity of this area? And even more

important, bearing in mind the present regional situation and possible future developments, to what extent will Romania's north-eastern border become the new line of inclusion - exclusion for the new Europe?

Romania-Moldova relations

On gaining its independence, in August 1991, the Republic of Moldova was confronted with unprecedented difficulties, not only from Russia's attempts to regain influence in the region but also from its internal political-economic instability and identity. Indeed, on one hand, the former Soviet Republic was burdened by economic stagnation, corruption and organised crime. Its transition, dubbed as a *"shock without therapy"*, destined the country to become the poorest nation in Europe, ranked 120th among the world's 191 nations, with 80% of the people living below the poverty line and external debt approaching 80% of GDP in 1998.[19] On the other hand, defining a "Moldovan nation" has been a difficult process, absorbing much energy which more consolidated states have been able to devote to building democracy and transforming their economy. Moldova is perhaps the most tenuous of all new states, having faced Russian-backed secessionist challenges from the Russian-speakers in Transdniestria in the east, and from the Gagauzi in the south. The new Republic was also under pressures from Romania and from Romanian nationalists within the country, who argued that Moldova, with its majority Romanian-speaking population, should rightfully return to its inter-war place as part of Romania. However, a distinct Moldovan identity, nurtured in the Soviet period, is still in the making and Moldova's chances of becoming "European" and integrated into the European structures will depend, among other things, on its relations with Romania and future developments in the region and in the world.

In this political environment, Romania's relations with the Republic of Moldova should be analysed in their historical dynamics. It is well known that following the Hitler-Stalin understanding, the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939, and the subsequent Soviet annexation in 1940 of the "sacred" Romanian territories of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, the frontier between Romania and Soviet Moldova remained sealed for 50 years. That is why, in spite of the special historical relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, their post-communist development was undermined by tensions, regional and international, objective and subjective, which did not permit the conclusion of a bilateral political treaty for more than eight years. After a romantic period of idealistic exaltation dictated by nationalistic demands for reunification based on the "German model", Romania's relations with Moldova became, in the last few years, more pragmatic and less dominated by big words. This policy of small steps helped the two sides to resume their talks on concluding a bilateral basic treaty after the 1996 general elections in Romania and Moldova.

Until then, the two countries were unable to complete the draft document mainly because of Romania's insistence that the treaty should include a clause denouncing the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov pact which forced Romania to cede the province of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. Such apprehensions were visible in spiritual life as well. The Moldovan authorities stubbornly refused to officially recognise the Bucharest-subordinated Bessarabian Metropolitan Church, re-established in 1993, and continued to support by all means the Moscow-subordinated Moldovan Metropolitan Church. The religious conflict led not only to a schism within the Orthodox community but also to a deep division in society at large.

After Romania's 1996 general elections, Constantinescu's administration was more constructive and open to specific Moldovan problems. Special attention was given to the existence of the former 14th Russian Army in Transdniestria, of the Russian separatists who used the "reunification danger" as an argument for promoting Tiraspol's independence and to the Republic's economic and energy dependence on Moscow. A former head of Moldova's Communist Party, Petru Lucinschi, who succeeded President Snegur following the 1996 presidential election has tried to steer a middle course between the Russian-dominated CIS, of which Moldova is a member, and the country's pro-European aspirations. Although 95% of voters reconfirmed their desire for independence in a March 1997 referendum, the country remains consumed by the century-old tensions associated with its location between Russia and Romania.

Many other developments suggested that Chisinau was trying to balance every opening towards Romania by further strengthening its traditional ties with Moscow. In July 1997, Defence Minister Valeriu Pasat went to Bucharest, where he signed an agreement on cooperation in military transport and agreed to set up a joint peacekeeping unit with Romania. A few days later, he was in Moscow, leaving the impression that he was reporting on his recent Romanian visit. There, he signed an agreement on military cooperation with Russian Defence Minister Sergeyev. The document provided for the training of Moldovan officers in Russia and for conducting joint manoeuvres of peacekeeping units. Duplicity seemed to hang over Moldova's increased appetite for closer relations with the West as well, as its controversial "neutrality" did not prevent the country seeking closer cooperation with Romania within NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and serving as a bridge between the Alliance and Russia.[20]

However, since 1997 Romania's military relations with Moldova have developed and now they are considered to be excellent. Not only are the two countries participating in joint PFP training programmes, but they are also cooperating on military-security issues, on organised crime, drug trafficking and illegal immigration. The Romanian Defence Minister's visit to Chisinau in September 1999 managed to defuse existing misunderstandings and to fortify friendship and good neighbourliness between the two armies. Victor Babiuc and his Moldovan counterpart, Boris Gamurari, agreed on more frequent meetings at the level of ministers and chiefs of staff of the two countries, and signed bilateral agreements in aviation, anti-aircraft defence and the creation of the joint Moldovan-Romanian peace-keeping battalion. They also discussed possibilities to create a multinational battalion with the participation of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and Poland.[21]

Meanwhile, the two states continued to develop their economic relations, especially in the area of energy delivery to Moldova. At present some 20% of Moldova's energy is imported from Romania, but problems persist in staging a common policy on this matter. In spite of the inauguration of a Moldovan-Romanian trade centre in Chisinau, the level of their bilateral trade is still far from satisfactory. In 1999, it reached some $100 million, and it was estimated that in the first five months of 2000 the bilateral trade was already over $75 million. This low level of trade persists in spite of measures to put some life into the Euro-regions of the Lower Danube and Upper Prut, created in 1997 by Romania, Moldova and Ukraine.

But one of the most sensitive issues in relations between Moldova and Romania was that of dual citizenship, which was reportedly requested by an increased number of Moldovans, especially since Romania was invited to start negotiations for membership of the EU. As Russian-language media in Chisinau presented the

situation as a *"tacit assimilation of Moldova by Romania",* the two governments started to discuss an agreement on dual citizenship. Recently, Romanian Foreign Minister Petre Roman said Romania would not refuse to allow Moldovans to enter the country after it becomes a member of the EU and that Bucharest did not plan to introduce visa restrictions for Moldovans. But having in mind the EU's requirements to increase its eastern border security, it is not surprising that Romania will insist in the near future on passports rather than ID cards for all Moldovans wanting to visit Romania.[22]

Despite all these contacts, the two countries' relations were still held back until early 2000 by the lack of progress in finding a mutually acceptable solution regarding their bilateral political treaty and the future developments between the two Romanian nations. The main problem, from the Romanian point of view, was the necessity to implement within such a political treaty the idea of reunification, an ideal not shared by Petru Lucinschi's pro-Russian government, and obviously rejected by Moscow and other European capitals. But to many people's surprise, the Foreign Ministers of Moldova and Romania, Nicolae Tabacaru and Petre Roman, managed to find a modus vivendi and on 28 April 2000 they initialled in Chisinau a basic treaty between their countries in the presence of the EU coordinator for the South East European Stability Pact Bodo Hombach. The treaty must now be approved by the two countries' presidents and legislatures.

Although negotiations on the treaty have lasted for more than eight years, the misunderstandings do not appear to have been really solved in the document finally agreed upon. Indeed, Bucharest has been pushing for a treaty that would express the anomaly of the imposed separation of Bessarabia from the Romanian state. It therefore wished the treaty to be called one of "fraternity," to speak of "two Romanian states," to include an explicit denunciation of the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, and to be explicitly written "in the Romanian language." For Chisinau, on the other hand, a treaty that would emphasise anomalies was a treaty that would in the long run undermine its independent statehood. The famous saying "in the long run we are all dead" was quite rightly perceived to be fully applicable if Moldova were to accept Bucharest's "suggestions."

The compromise solutions, as with all compromises, are, as a Romanian daily put it colloquially, "neither horse, nor donkey." The treaty is neither one of "fraternity" nor a "regular treaty," but is rather designated as one of "privileged relations." No reference is made to "two Romanian states," but mention is made of the joint "roots in the historic past," and of a "community of culture and language." The Russian-German pact is not explicitly denounced, but is implicitly rejected by making reference to two documents approved by the Moldovan parliament and by the Romanian government in 1991, upon Moldova's declaration of independence. One must note that the Moldovan position on this point is rather delicate: the declaration of independence approved by the country's parliament in 1991 had indeed "noted" the pact's denunciation by the "parliaments of many states" but had stopped short of embracing that denunciation, for nullification of the pact would have found Moldova back to the status of a Romanian province. Not so the Romanian government's 1991 declaration, which, while welcoming the Moldovan declaration of independence, viewed it as "a decisive step on the road to peaceful annihilation of the perfidious consequences" of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, which was described as "directed against the rights and interests of the Romanian people." Finally, the treaty does not stipulate in which language it is formulated, though it is clearly written in Romanian. The Moldovans had long insisted that mention be made of the fact that the treaty is written in either the "state" or the "official"

languages (plural), for although the two are practically identical, the state language in Moldovan is defined in the constitution as being "Moldovan."[23]

Naturally, each side was attempting to present the treaty in the interpretation best suited to over-ruling possible objections to it. In Moldova, President Petru Lucinschi and parliament chairman Dumitru Diacov emphasised the *"regular features"* of the document, which, they claimed, contains *"all provisions"* that a regular treaty (that is, indistinguishable from other basic treaties) should include. Meanwhile, the communist faction of the Moldovan parliament walked out of the chamber to protest at the *"Romanisation"* of Moldova. In Romania, Foreign Minister Petre Roman chose to present the treaty as being one *"between two fraternal states"* and spoke again of *"the two Romanian states"* while referring to the treaty's significance. He went one step further, explaining that the *"principle of inviolability of borders"* included in the text does not necessarily rule out border modifications (that is, the eventual re-unification of the two states), since the Helsinki Final Act stipulates that "peaceful border modifications," with the agreement of both sides, are possible.[24]

What, then, is *"privileged"* about the treaty? What made the two sides suddenly agree on the compromise? And why now and not earlier? Bodo Hombach's presence at the initialling ceremony provided more than a hint. Praising the treaty, the EU official said that the document was likely to help both Romania's quest for integration in the EU and Moldova's effort to achieve EU associate status and to become a fully-fledged member of the South East European Balkan Stability Pact. Indeed, soon thereafter the Romanian President Emil Constantinescu, attending a meeting of East Central European heads of state in Hungary, apparently secured the agreement of his peers for Chisinau to be invited to their next meeting. Moreover, politicians in Romania and Moldova talked about the possibility of the two countries joining the EU by the end of the decade together and at the same time.[25]

Romania's reasons for agreeing to the pact now can also be linked to the EU integration effort, as Bucharest, though invited to accession talks recently, has little else to offer the EU than proof of its eagerness to solve outstanding problems with its neighbours. The "privileged relationship" on closer scrutiny amounts to no more than an engagement on Romania's side to promote Moldova's integration efforts alongside its own. By so doing, Romania has in fact accepted Moldova's position that a "re-integration" of the two countries can only occur within the larger context of European integration. But Bucharest is also undertaking to defend "Moldovan territorial integrity" and "sovereignty" in all possible forums and in practice. Roman explained that this is precisely an illustration of the "privileged relations" aspect of the treaty. This allusion to the Transdniester conflict is one that may be problematic. The OSCE rotating chairmanship that Romania takes over in 2001 could be a forum to defend and promote Moldovan full sovereignty. But that prestigious position is by definition limited in time. And an eventual involvement by Romania in the Transdniestrian conflict beyond words and mediation efforts is unlikely to convince the EU that Bucharest promotes regional stability.

Romania-Ukraine Relations

Throughout the 1990s it has been widely recognised that Ukraine's success is key to a stable, peaceful post-Soviet world. And throughout the decade such success has proved elusive, as Ukraine's economy has declined year by year. The prospect of a change of power in 1999's presidential elections remained at the top of

Ukraine's political agenda throughout most of the late 1990s, as the struggle between the president and parliament, more or less contested since independence, gathered momentum. President Leonid Kuchma won in the November 1999 elections, but his victory was more a vote against a return to Communism than an affirmation of the incumbent's policies. Although at the end of 1999 Ukraine gained its first truly reformist Prime Minister, inter-branch rivalries are still spilling over into economic policy, while economic reforms are minimal and the risk of foreign debt default is looming. On the international stage, despite the difficulties caused by the Kosovo crisis, Kuchma's "multi-vector" policy of balancing NATO and the EU on one hand and Russia on the other - and retaining meanwhile its non-aligned status - was maintained, although the hope for EU membership prospects remained remote. But the failure of the EU to offer Ukraine a realisable long-term goal could jeopardise the multi-vector policy and force a reorientation of Ukraine's foreign policy. The departure of Yel'tsin and the arrival of Putin on Moscow's stage will generate further uncertainty in the years to come.[26]

Bilateral relations between Romania and Ukraine followed the patterns of their overall political development. Indeed, after Ukraine gained its independence, Romania opened an embassy in Kyiv in 1992, but the territorial dispute continued to prevent the development of good relations between the two countries. For more than 4 years, the negotiations between the two countries for a bilateral political treaty of good neighbourliness were stalled by Romania's demand to include in the treaty a clause condemning the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, a demand which was obviously not acceptable to Kyiv. Indeed, Ukraine considers that the old territorial disputes over Bukovina and Bessarabia were settled by the former Soviet Union and all existing problems should be addressed to the Russian Federation as the historical successor of the USSR. In Bucharest's view, this condemnation clause, the problem of Serpents' Island in the Black Sea, and guarantees for the ethnic Romanian minority living in Ukraine were the main issues which postponed of the conclusion of a treaty until after Romania's November 1996 general and presidential elections.

Indeed, relations with Ukraine became extremely important for the new Constantinescu administration as settling disputes with all its neighbours became a condition for Euro-Atlantic integration. Constantinescu's new approach was based on his belief that *"Romania is faced with the option either to remain linked with past history or to take into consideration its present and future security"*. As a result, very soon after the new cabinet was sworn in, Bucharest decided to resume negotiations for the political treaty with Ukraine, and to change its strategy towards all regional neighbours. During the negotiations which took place in the first half of 1997, Romania proposed a *"compromise package of historic sacrifices"*, in which the "Pandora's box" of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was avoided. In exchange, Romania asked for the inclusion in the treaty of the Council of Europe's Recommendation 1201 to ensure the protection of the rights of the Romanian minority in Ukraine. After more negotiations, the treaty was signed by President Emil Constantinescu and Leonid Kuchma in Romania, in the Black Sea resort of Neptun, on 2 June 1997.[27]

The Romanian-Ukrainian Political Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourliness, which was subsequently ratified by the Romanian parliament, will last for 10 years and will be automatically extended for a further five years unless either party gives one year's notice of its intention to suspend the agreement. The treaty proclaimed the current borders between the two countries *"inviolable"*, which means that Romania has renounced any claim to territory that was seized by the Soviet Union

in 1940 and is now in Ukraine. The treaty also made provision for the protection of national minorities, which covers the rights of some 200,000 ethnic Romanians in Ukraine and a similar number of ethnic Ukrainians in Romania. It also made specific provisions for two "Euro-regions" (areas of special trilateral Romanian-Ukrainian-Moldovan trans-border cooperation in economic, cultural, educational and environmental fields) on Upper Prut and Lower Prut; the expansion of bilateral links and measures to combat organised crime.

But as expected, the treaty was unable to sort out all the existing problems between the two countries. It therefore provided for more negotiations to take place in order to seek a solution for the state frontier, including the demarcation of the Black Sea continental shelf, and the status of Serpents' Island. This island - a 17 hectare piece of land, in front of the Sulina arm of the River Danube, was included in the Soviet Union in 1948 as a result of a simple document signed by the Romanian communist authorities - and became part of Ukraine when the Soviet empire collapsed. Agreement on these matters is critical for exploration and drilling rights in the Black Sea, in an area which is believed to be rich in oil reserves. According to the treaty, in the event of failure to conclude an agreement, the problem will be referred to the UN International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Unable to reach an agreement on the demarcation of their common border, relations between the two countries remained complicated during 1998 and 1999 in spite of a variety of high level presidential and governmental meetings. The Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk's visit to Romania in February 1999 - the first by a Foreign Minister of Ukraine in seven years - was considered by the Romanian Foreign Minister, Andrei Plesu, *"a significant breakthrough"* in the relations between the two countries, but the nature of that breakthrough remained unclear. The two sides were said to have reached agreement to continue negotiations on *"delicate and sensitive issues"* and to settle them *"amicably"*, without appealing to the court in The Hague. While refusing to elaborate, Tarasyuk said that *"nobody challenges"* the status of Serpents' Island as *"part of Ukrainian territory"*. The two foreign ministers agreed that the remaining problems between the two countries, including the return of properties taken by the communist regime from the ethnic Romanian community, would be assessed and sorted out by a joint commission for minorities set up in October 1998. Following a sustained anti-Romanian campaign in the Ukrainian mass media, officials from the Romanian Foreign Ministry showed their *"surprise"* at the allegations summed up in the phrase *"Romania's territorial claims"* with direct reference to the Serpents' Island.[28]

In spite of the obvious progress in the relations between the two countries, many ethnic Romanians in northern Bukovina continued to remain unhappy about the level of the treaty's implementation. As a result, some media outlets in Romanian have long engaged in a campaign aimed at stirring up anti-Ukrainian sentiment, claiming that Ukraine does not respect its obligations toward the 200,000-strong Romanian-speaking minority. According to the Romanian nationalists and some sectors of the mass media, the Romanian minority in Ukraine is still subjected to considerable pressure to be assimilated. But those conducting such a campaign disregard the fact that some of these "Romanians" consider themselves Moldovans and reject close contacts with Bucharest. On the other hand, Ukraine, while not denying that problems do exist, considers that a lack of funds, rather than ill-will, is to blame. Kyiv was also quick to point out that there is only one Ukrainian high school in Romania and that instruction there is conducted 75% in the Romanian language.[29]

In this general context, President Emil Constantinescu paid a visit to Kyiv in May 1999, the first official visit of a Romanian president to Ukraine. During a press conference, Constantinescu assessed that for Romania, an independent sovereign and powerful Ukraine is a matter of national interest. Together with his Ukrainian counterpart, Leonid Kuchma, Constantinescu visited Cernauti, where they discussed with ethnic Romanians their demands for more cultural rights. During the visit, the two presidents agreed to speed up the implementation of joint projects, including a multinational university in Cernauti, sharing energy resources and a joint Ukrainian-Romanian-Hungarian-Slovak battalion.

Today, the two countries' political relations are still far from excellent in spite of the conclusion of the treaty and the agreement to set up a commission of experts to prepare a treaty on the state frontier. Indeed, after seven rounds of talks on the delimitation of their state frontier, although they made *"substantial progress",* no treaty has been signed by the two parties. So far, they agreed on the preamble to the treaty and on the definition elements for the terms used in the treaty. According to Bucharest officials, Romania is interested to preserve in the future treaty *"the principles and norms of international law"*, considering *"the inordinate way in which the frontier was traced, in disregard of any rule of law, by setting border markers at random in 1948-1949".* Meanwhile, judging from hints dropped by Ukrainian officials, the Romanian government appears to have agreed to renounce any claim on Serpents' Island, with the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry arguing that Ukraine's *"rightful ownership"* of the island *"is beyond any question".* In exchange, it seemed that Ukraine would agree to jointly exploit the natural resources on the continental shelf. And as one commission on this matter was not enough the two sides decided, according to a declaration issued recently by Romania, to set up yet another joint commission on marking and checking the frontier. The work of all these joint commissions has not managed so far to sort out the still existing misunderstandings between the two countries. In order to seek solutions, the two sides are more interested for the time being in setting up commissions of experts to study the issues at stake. As conventional wisdom has it: where there is good will, issues are solved, where there is none, commissions are set up.[30]

The economic relations between the two countries were very well characterised by the Ukrainian Ambassador to Bucharest, Ihor Harcenko, who assessed at the end of 1999 that they *"do not reflect the existing good political relations".* Indeed, according to data presented by the Ambassador, Romania's exports in 1998 amounted to $52 million, which represent a 40% decrease compared with 1997, while Romania's imports in 1998 reached only $167 million, some 15% less than in 1997. During 1999, Romania's trade with Ukraine was under $150 million, representing some 60% less than in 1998. The Ukrainian Ambassador also mentioned that still no solution has been found for the recovery by Romania of some $700 million invested in the Krivoi Rog industrial complex developed in the 1970s and 1980s by the Soviet Union. The reason given was the fact that both countries are undergoing a painful transition period. Secondly, being in this transition period, both countries are more interested in developing their trade with important foreign companies, rather than developing their bilateral economic links.[31]

However, future economic relations between Romania and Ukraine are based on Romania's strategic interest in becoming a key player in the Black Sea region and part of the new link to the important energy resources and emerging markets of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. In this respect, the prospects of increased economic relations on a bilateral and multilateral basis are potentially important if these

countries pool their existing resources and possibilities of cooperation. In 1998, Romania and Ukraine decided to set up a joint economic commission to increase their trade within the newly defined Euro-regions, including the sharing of energy resources and the creation of a free trade zone in the Lower Prut area, with the participation of the Republic of Moldova. And aware that any project of infrastructure rehabilitation may generate economic prosperity, Romania and Ukraine have started political talks to attract EU funding to such projects for the Carpathian Euro-region.

According to Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, state secretary with the Romanian Foreign Ministry who visited the Transcarpathian region (Ukraine) in March 2000, the implementation of infrastructure projects to connect the Transcarpathian region to northern Maramures (Romania) would provide economic prosperity and real rapprochement between the Romanians living on the two banks of the Tisza River. Present talks between Romania and Ukraine are focused on trans-regional cooperation with special emphasis on the need to build a road bridge across the Tisza, between Sighetu Marmatiei and Slatina, financed with EU funds, and on the extension of the natural gas distribution network both in northern Maramures and southern Transcarpathian region, adjacent to the Ukrainian-Romanian gas pipeline Khust - Satu Mare which began operating at the end of 1999. The two parties are also in negotiation for a cultural centre in Slatina that should cover all the Transcarpathian region and help preserve the identity of Romanians in the historical Maramures region, as well as the trans-frontier traffic, and the opening of a consular office to handle specific problems. Addressing the Romanian community in Slatina, the Romanian diplomat said that *"despite history that has separated us, there is an unbreakable bond between the country and the Romanians in the Transcarpathian region which has set an example of extreme cultural resilience."* Ways of preservation of the Romanian community's ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity, and the application of these infrastructure projects are under active negotiation.[32]

Romania's military relations with Ukraine could also be seen as reinforcing Bucharest's position in the Black Sea region. Based on the principle of mutual support for NATO integration, Romania has initiated the establishment of a Romanian-Ukrainian common military unit, with the participation of Poland as well, to be used as an intervention force in international peace operations. Beside the proposed joint force, other pragmatic military projects are under discussion with Ukraine, as a means of international cooperation in order to face the new risks and challenges in the region. Seen as a valuable approach to regional security-building, these military projects could have an important impact on security and stability at Romania's north-eastern border.

And indeed, official talks held last year between Romanian Defence Minister Victor Babiuc and his Ukrainian counterpart, General Oleksandr Kuzmuk, reached agreement to finalise three bilateral accords by the end of 2000. These accords will refer to measures aimed at increasing confidence between the two countries, to procurement and logistics, and to the protection of secret information. At a joint news conference, the sides announced that they agreed on meetings to be held between secretaries of state in charge of defence issues and heads of the General Staffs of the two armies. *"The meeting was fruitful, we agreed on important matters for the evolution of the Romanian-Ukrainian relations, that will become more substantial. The talks were open, as they are between friends who share interests concerning stability and cooperation in Europe. The visit can be considered a success,"* concluded Minister Victor Babiuc. Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksandr

Kuzmuk underscored that during this long-expected visit he agreed with his Romanian counterpart to start the implementation of all plans initiated in 1999. He also voiced his hope that *"in the future the ties between the two countries will develop toward friendly cooperation."* Minister Kuzmuk let one understand that neither changes in the Kremlin nor Romania's firm option to join the North-Atlantic Alliance would influence Ukraine's foreign and military policy and its bilateral relations with the countries involved in the processes.[33]

It is no secret that Bucharest's rather surprising willingness to sign the unfavourable 1997 bilateral treaty and to work towards strengthening relations with Ukraine was motivated by one major factor: the hope of securing an invitation at the NATO summit in summer 1997 to join the alliance. With those hopes dashed in Madrid in 1997, as well as in Washington in 1999, it is needless to say that many extreme-nationalist parties in Bucharest considered the renunciation of historical territorial claims on Ukraine and the conclusion of the bilateral treaty as *"the most serious act of national treason in Romania's modern history".*[34]

But why did Romania accepted such a compromise solution? First of all, because it apparently has no choice. Ukraine, which is both a potential nuclear power and, despite its continued economic difficulties, a potential strong economic partner of the West, is much more likely to succeed in enlisting Western support for its goals than is Bucharest. Secondly, in the context of Ukraine's political instability and a foreseeably more assertive Russian foreign policy, Romania was aware that unless they made progress, they might have to conduct negotiations with more nationalist and perhaps even "nostalgic Communists" in the driver's seats in Kyiv and Moscow - a somewhat less than thrilling prospect for Bucharest. Thirdly, Kyiv has already taken some steps that are seen in Bucharest as aimed at increasing Ukrainian territorial claims. Indeed, Kyiv has declared the area around Serpents' Island as a "natural reserve area", which under international law would give Ukraine the right - at least in theory - to enlarge its territorial waters from 12 to 200 nautical miles from the coastline.

In sum, Romania's present political, economic and military relations with Ukraine are far from being without set-backs, in spite of concrete steps to overcome historical misunderstandings and communist inheritance. In the shadow of Moscow, these relations are not going to evolve, in the medium-term, into modern regional cooperation, free of fear and misunderstandings. Nonetheless, the existing level of their bilateral relations could be improved in certain conditions, and both countries could play a more important role in the geostrategic stability of the Black Sea region. However, the good nature of these relations is not yet irreversible, and if Bucharest's dream of a "Greater Romania" came to the surface once again in the years to come, we could expect tensions at the border between the two countries.

POSSIBLE FUTURE SCENARIOS

Romania's security concerns for its north-east border are based on the historic legacy of the region, and on Romanian nationalists' claim that Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, an area encompassing present-day Moldova and a part of south-western Ukraine, still rightfully belong to Romania. While Romania is in no position to demand the return of these territories, still inhabited by ethnic Romanians, some fear that the territorial claim on Bessarabia and northern Bukovina could appear again should external instabilities surface in the area.

It is true that the present Romanian government officially maintains no territorial claim on any other state and has discounted any possibility of Romania ever annexing the "lost" territories by means of force. It is also true that Romania was the first country to recognise the newly independent Republics of Moldova and Ukraine and fully respects their sovereignty. Bucharest, however, is still seeking a diplomatic condemnation of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and its secret annexes, from the government of the Russian Federation, despite the fact that Romania renounced this clause in the political bilateral treaties signed with Ukraine in 1997 and with Moldova in April 2000. This has made impossible for the time being the conclusion of a bilateral political treaty with the Russian Federation, and could exacerbate Romania's relations with its eastern neighbours, should the instability of the region will become apparent.

The remaining official contentious aspect of the Ukraine-Romania relationship is, however, not Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, but the disputed Serpents' Island in the Black Sea. Ukrainian officials have dismissed Romania's claim on the island and have emphasised that it is not willing to consider any territorial concessions to Romania. However, despite the conclusion of their bilateral political treaty and new initiatives for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region, the problem of Serpents' Island remains unsolved, and as a result, the relations between the two countries remain sour to this day, amid speculations that the Romanian minority in Ukraine continue to be subjected to considerable pressure to be assimilated. Meanwhile, despite the fact that the present regime in Kyiv considers that Ukraine's neutrality is the only option in the current European climate, and it has nothing against integration of Romania or other former communist countries into NATO, some Romanian politicians are happy to remind public opinion that the Helsinki treaty forbids the violent change of borders, but not the peaceful change of frontiers.

Romania's relations with Moldova, on the other hand, remained restrained even after 1996, when Petre Lucinschi replaced President Mircea Snegur. However, since the April 1998 parliamentary elections in Chisinau, and after a new centre-right coalition government came to power the two countries' negotiators finally agreed on a political treaty. A democratic president in the Republic of Moldova following general and presidential elections at the end of 2000 could bring about a more pro-Romanian government. In these conditions, it is possible that discussions about a peaceful re-unification of the two countries will surface again in Bucharest, although the 65% ethnic Romanians in Moldova continue to be more interested in their economic problems rather than the issue of unification. And as long as the Transdniestrian conflict is not resolved following a complete withdrawal of former 14th Russian Army from Tiraspol, and while Moldova remains energy dependent on Russia, talks on peaceful re-unification between Romania and Moldova cannot take place anyway.

But what will happen if Romania becomes more pro-active in its demands for unification and annexation of its former territories, now part of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova? At least three possible scenarios should be taken into consideration:

1. Peaceful reunification under the EU and NATO umbrella

A democratic and prosperous Romania, integrated into the EU and Atlantic structures could become a model for Moldova after 2007. In some conditions of political stability and economic revival, the EU could accept Moldova within the

organisation at the same time as Romania. Meanwhile, Ukraine and Russia, in a difficult economic situation but politically stable and democratic, interested in strengthening their relations with the EU and being integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures, would accept the initiative of the pro-Romanian government in Chisinau, to declare a peaceful re-unification with Romania. The majority Romanian population in northern Bessarabia and Hertsa county, territories belonging now to Ukraine, would also ask for unification with Romania. Ukraine, also in line for EU integration and interested in becoming part of "civilised Europe", would accept the unification and in this way, Romania would recreate the "Greater Romania" of 1918.

2. Forceful recreation of "Greater Romania"

Romania, in spite of being part of a buffer zone between West and East, is economically more prosperous and with reformed and modernised Armed Forces, as a result of its efforts to become integrated into the NATO structures. Moldova is still a member of the CIS and under Russia's economic and political zone of influence, but without the danger of the former 14th Army, withdrawn for financial reasons by Russia. In these conditions it is quite possible to see the revival of a strong pro-Romanian movement in Moldova, supported by all the nationalist forces in Romania. Political and economic instability in Moldova could generate nationalistic clashes between Romanian/Moldovan freedom fighters and ethnic Russians in Transdniestria. In case of Russia's political and economic instability, a referendum on peaceful unification with Romania could give the ethnic Romanian population on the right bank of the Dniester River the opportunity to win the majority of the votes. As happened in 1918, Romania will be more than happy to send its army to protect Moldova after such a decision. Ukraine, although in economic turmoil and political instability, could consider Romania's action as aggression and, with Moscow's approval, could send its troops in to Moldova to defend the country. But Romania, well equipped and trained, and with the quiet acceptance of the West, would be able to defend Moldova's frontiers. Moreover, Romania could accept the integration of Transdniestria within Ukraine in exchange for the "lost" territories of northern Bessarabia and Hertsa, and in this way recreate the borders of "Greater Romania".

3. "Greater Romania" under Russian control

Romania, Moldova and Ukraine, doomed by political instabilities and economic collapse and without any hopes of being integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures, are now part of Russia's sphere of influence and active members of the CIS. Russia, under the leadership of an ultra-nationalist leader, could decide to occupy "untruthful" Romania. In order to develop a strong first line of protection against NATO influence, Russia decides to allow the unification of the former "Greater Romania" as a new CIS republic, under complete control from Moscow.

Obviously, these are sketchy, theoretical scenarios which are not going to develop from beginning to end on the same pattern. The conclusion of these scenarios is, however, that irrespective of future developments, Romania is going to play an important role in the geopolitical evolution of the region and of Europe as a whole. Indeed, if Romania is to be relegated to a buffer zone at the outskirts of "Europe", its political, economic and social situation will not improve in the years to come. On the other hand, there is still time for the present political elite in Bucharest to determine a turning point in the country's history by making the necessary radical

reforms to ensure a swift integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures in the next round of enlargement.

CONCLUSION

In spite of objective and subjective setbacks, Romania's relations with its two north-eastern neighbours, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, have developed in a positive manner, especially after Romania's 1996 elections. In particular the political and military relations, as well as future projects, can be seen as a valuable approach to "anchor" Moldova and Ukraine to the virtual space of Euro-Atlantic democracy and market economy. Indeed, the existing positive relations between Romania and Moldova and between Romania and Ukraine are having an important impact on the security and stability of the Black Sea region, and of Europe as a whole. But Romania's road towards normal relations with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine as well as full stability and security at its north-eastern border is still paved with good intentions, and also with many mines. Unfortunately, all the mines are made in Russia and it will be up to President Putin and a more democratic government in Moscow to defuse these mines. Otherwise, Russia will maintain this region in shadow at its own peril. NATO and the EU would do well to be aware of these shadows, as their borders move towards this glowing 'hot spot'.

ENDNOTES

[1] Wight M., *Power Politics*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1978), p. 25.

[2] For more details of Romania's historical background see Rady, M., *Romania in Turmoil,* (London: IB Tauris, 1992).

[3] Huntington S. L., *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 128.

[4] Deckers W., "Two Souls, Twin Realities" in *Central Europe Review,* Vol.2, No. 26, 3 July 2000.

[5] See www.centraleurope.com "Outgoing President Shakes Bucharest with Corruption Blast", 19 July 2000.

[6] Rady M., *Romania in Turmoil,* (London: IB Tauris, 1992), p. 26.

[7] Birch S., "In the Shadow of Moscow: Ukraine and Moldova", in Stephen White, ed., *Developments in Central and East European Politics,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), p. 61.

[8] A detailed summary of ethnic groups in Moldova can be found at www. tol.cz.com/countries/moldova.

[9] Buzan B., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis,* (London: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1998).

[10] For a detailed account of civil-war in Transdniestria see Waters T., "Moldova", in *Instabilities in Post-Communist Europe,* CSRC, January 1995.

[11]Basa-Press, Chisinau, 7 January 2000.

[12] Quoted in Infotag, "Separatist leader reluctant to let troops leave Transdniestria", 10 June 2000.

[13]Basa Press, Chisinau, 20 June 2000.

[14] RFE Newsline, 4 August 2000

[15] Ibid., 21 June 2000.

[16] Ibid., 19 June 2000.

[17] Ascherson Neil, *Black Sea,* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 10.

[18] Bailes Alyson, "Subregional organisations: the Cinderella of European Security", *NATO Review,* Vol. 45, no. 2, (March 1997), pp.27-31.

[19] See Robu I., "Shock without Therapy", in Soimaru V., ed., *The Falling Prime Ministers,* (Chisinau: Chivitas, 1999).

[20] For a comprehensive review of Romania-Moldova military relations prior to 1997 see Baleanu G., *Republic of Moldova's Acrobatic Diplomacy,* CSRC, September 1997.

[21] Rompres, 23 September 1999.

[22] Lovatt Catherine, "Moldova: Barely a State", in *Central European Review,* Vol. 1, No. 11, 6 September 1999.

[23] *Romania Libera,* no. 3074, 3 May 2000, p. 3.

[24] *Ibid.,* no. 3089, 20 May 2000, "Bessarabia and its rights" in supplement Aladdin, p. I.

[25] Shafir M., Romania, Moldova Conclude Problematic Basic Treaty, in RFE/RL Newsline, 7 May 2000.

[26] An interesting paper on Ukraine's past and future can be found at www.ce-review.org , Whitmore S., *Ukraine 1999: On the threshold of change?,* Central European Review, Vol. 2. No.1, 10 January 2000

[27] *Romania Libera,* no. 2183, 3 June 1997, p. 3.

[28] RFE/RL Newsline, 22 February 1999.

[29] *Romania Libera,* no. 2735, 19 April 1999.

[30] See Shafir M., "Breakthrough in Ukrainian-Romanian Relations?" in RFE/RL *Newsline,* 23 February 2000.

[31] *Romania Libera,* no. 3017, 14 December 1999, p. 2.

[32] Rompres, "Romanian Diplomat Visits Transcarpathian Region in Ukraine" 6 March 2000.

[33] Bucharest Radio, "Romanian, Ukrainian Defence Ministers Agree on Accords", 19 January 2000.

[34] *Romania Libera,* no. 2158, 5 May 1997, p. 1.