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ROMANIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY BETWEEN THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE USA AND THE EU STRATEGIC AGENDA

Sînziana IANCU, PhD,

Major, Expert, Euro-Atlantic Resilience Centre (E-ARC), Bucharest, Romania
E-mail address: iancu_sanziana@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The paper analyses how Romania's national security is influenced by the Strategic Partnership with the United States of America and the European Union's Strategic Agenda for the 2024-2029 period. In an international context marked by insecurity and accelerated geopolitical shifts, Romania holds a key position on the eastern border of the Euro-Atlantic space. The study explores the main directions of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, the points of convergence and divergence between the two strategic frameworks, as well as the future courses of action for the Romanian state. The conclusion highlights the need for a coherent strategy capable of leveraging the complementarity of these two main pillars of national security.*

Keywords: *conflict; Ukraine; Russian Federation; EU Agenda; U.S. Strategic Partnership.*

Introduction

National security represents a fundamental concept for the existence and sovereignty of any state, defining its capacity to protect essential values, institutions, population, and territory against internal and external threats. For Romania, positioned at the intersection of major geostrategic interests in the Black Sea region, national security acquires complex dimensions, being influenced by both internal developments and international dynamics.

In this context, the Strategic Partnership with the United States of America and membership in the European Union represent two essential pillars of Romania's foreign and security policy. This paper examines the interaction between these two dimensions during the 2024-2029 period, highlighting the points of convergence as well as the challenges of maintaining an effective strategic balance.

The strategic relevance of Romania within the Euro-Atlantic and European frameworks has grown significantly in recent years. The consolidation of the Strategic Partnership with the United States – formally established in 1997 and reinforced through continued military, political, and technological cooperation – has positioned Romania as a frontline NATO member and a regional pillar of stability. American military presence on Romanian soil, including key assets, such as the Aegis Ashore missile defence system at Deveselu and the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base, reflects the critical role Romania plays in ensuring security along NATO's eastern flank. Beyond defence, the U.S.–Romanian partnership extends to cybersecurity, justice, energy diversification, and joint efforts in combating organised and transnational crime.

Simultaneously, Romania's 2007 integration into the European Union continues to shape its security and strategic outlook. The EU's Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029 outlines an ambitious vision for a more resilient, autonomous, and capable Europe, structured around three key priorities: a free and democratic Europe, a strong and secure Europe, and a prosperous and competitive Europe. Romania's active involvement in EU defence initiatives – such as SAFE, PESCO, the European Defense Fund, and CSDP operations - highlights its commitment to a common European security

framework. At the same time, EU policies on societal resilience, digital sovereignty, green transition, and strategic autonomy offer Romania both challenges and valuable opportunities to adapt its internal structures and policies.

While the United States and the European Union share many strategic objectives, their priorities and methods sometimes diverge, particularly in areas such as global competition with China, energy policies, and approaches to conflict resolution. For Romania, this dual alignment presents both a strategic challenge and a diplomatic balancing opportunity. Navigating between transatlantic commitments and European integration requires a flexible, proactive, and coherent foreign policy capable of harmonising overlapping but occasionally competing agendas.

In a global context marked by rising instability, the war in Ukraine, evolving threats in cyberspace, and intensifying geopolitical competition, Romania must consolidate its strategic posture. This includes strengthening its national defence, modernising its military and technological capacities, reinforcing internal societal resilience, and contributing constructively to both NATO and EU efforts in regional and global security. Positioned as both a beneficiary and a potential provider of stability in the Black Sea region, Romania's ability to effectively leverage its strategic partnerships will be a determining factor in safeguarding its national security throughout the 2024–2029 period and beyond.

1. The strategic partnership between Romania and the U.S.

The Strategic Partnership between Romania and the United States, officially launched on July 11, 1997, during the visit of U.S. President William (Bill) J. Clinton to Bucharest, has significantly strengthened over the past decades, becoming a central element of Romania's foreign and national security policy. It focuses on cooperation in key areas such as defence, cybersecurity, energy, and the rule of law (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Romania builds its security strategy on the premise that its main security guarantees stem from its NATO membership and the privileged relationship it holds with the United States – a partner that shares its perception of the threat level along the eastern flank of the Alliance (MFA, 2025).

According to Romania's National Defense Strategy for the 2025-2030 period, the Strategic Partnership with the United States continues to represent a core pillar of Romania's foreign and security policy, underpinning its role within NATO and complementing its engagement in the European Union.

A fundamental pillar of this partnership is the military component. The presence of U.S. troops on Romanian territory, the development of facilities at the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base, and the deployment of the U.S. ballistic missile defence system, "Aegis Ashore", at the Deveselu Military Base¹ underscore Romania's strategic importance in the security architecture of NATO's eastern flank. The Aegis Ashore site in Romania achieved operational certification in May 2016 (US Congress, 2025). Romania's constant participation in joint NATO military exercises fosters interoperability and enhances rapid response capabilities in the face of potential conventional or hybrid threats. Furthermore, the signing of the "Access Agreement" (MFA, 2025) regarding United States armed forces activities stationed on Romanian territory, on December 6, 2005 (which entered into force on July 21, 2006), as well as Romania's military involvement in theaters of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in support of the United States-led international coalition against terrorism, have constituted major coordinates in the bilateral relations established between Romania and the United States. In addition, Romania's role within United States Operation *Atlantic Resolve* has further consolidated the military dimension of the Strategic Partnership. Launched in 2014 in response to the deteriorating security environment in Eastern Europe, *Atlantic Resolve* aims to demonstrate sustained the United States commitment to NATO's collective defence and to enhance deterrence on the Alliance's Eastern flank. Through rotational deployments of United States' forces, pre-positioning of

¹ The signing, on September 13, 2011, of the "Agreement between Romania and the United States of America on the Deployment of the United States Ballistic Missile Defense System in Romania".

equipment and an intensified tempo of joint training and exercises hosted on Romanian territory, the operation has significantly contributed to strengthening allied interoperability, readiness and forward defence posture in the Black Sea region. Romania's consistent participation in and support for *Atlantic Resolve* initiatives underscores its status as a key security provider and a reliable ally in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

Beyond the military dimension, bilateral cooperation also includes areas such as economic security, collaboration in internal affairs and justice, energy security (projects on diversifying energy sources, including small modular reactors), combating cyber threats, and promoting good governance in the spirit of shared security and prosperity². The United States has supported Romania's efforts to strengthen digital resilience and protect critical infrastructure.

Additionally, cooperation in intelligence sharing and coordination between law enforcement institutions contributes to combating terrorism, human trafficking and other forms of transnational crime. Recent provisions outlined in the United States National Security Strategy 2025 reaffirm Europe's centrality to the United States strategic interests, emphasising deterrence, forward defence and the strengthening of allied burden-sharing in response to persistent Russian revisionism. While the document signals a growing expectation that European allies assume greater responsibility for their own security, it does not indicate a strategic disengagement from the continent. Nevertheless, a hypothetical total withdrawal of the United States' forces from Romanian territory would represent a major strategic rupture, significantly weakening deterrence on NATO's southeastern flank, increasing Romania's exposure to conventional and hybrid threats in the Black Sea region and placing substantial additional pressure on both national defence capabilities and the European pillar of NATO. Such a scenario would fundamentally alter Romania's security calculus and underscore the irreplaceable role of the United States' military presence in the current regional balance of power.

2. The EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029

The European Union's Strategic Agenda for the 2024-2029 period reflects the commitment of the 27 member states to strengthen the Union's resilience in an international context marked by instability, geopolitical competition, climate crises, and accelerated technological advancement. Adopted at a time of major geopolitical shifts – including the ongoing war in Ukraine, the rise of authoritarian regimes, and the challenges posed by emerging technologies – the Agenda is structured around three key pillars: *A Free and Democratic Europe*, *A Strong and Secure Europe*, and *A Prosperous and Competitive Europe*. These encompass priorities such as protecting citizens and European values, developing a competitive European economy, achieving the green and digital transitions, and promoting the EU's interests and values on the global stage (European Council, EU Council, 2024).

A Free and Democratic Europe sets the following objectives (European Council, EU Council, 2024): * promoting and protecting the rule of law³; * safeguarding online debates; * strengthening resilience and democratic discourse; * combating foreign interference and destabilisation efforts; * supporting the UN Charter and a global framework for peace, justice, and security.

A Strong and Secure Europe outlines priorities such as (European Council, EU Council, 2024): * continuing support for Ukraine, including in its reconstruction efforts and in securing a just and lasting peace; * preparing the EU for defence through increased defence spending and investment; * Maintaining strong relationships with transatlantic partners and NATO; * Taking necessary measures

² Aspects stipulated within The National Defense Strategy for the 2020–2024 period, which was approved by Decision No. 22 of the Joint Session of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies on June 30, 2020 and was published in the Official Gazette, Part I, No. 574 of July 1, 2020 (Administrația prezidențială / The Romanian presidential administration, 2025).

³ Within the EU, the rule of law, just as in Romania's Strategic Partnership with the United States, plays an essential role. It derives from the treaties signed by the member states, which include both the objectives and priorities of the EU and the activities of EU institutions that have the authority to create legislation, which the member states are then required to implement.

for prevention, response, and resilience in the face of crises, natural or man-made disasters, or health emergencies; * Combating organised crime, radicalisation, terrorism, and violent extremism; * managing borders and migration; * supporting the continuation of EU enlargement alongside internal reforms.

A Prosperous and Competitive Europe prioritises actions such as (European Council, EU Council, 2024): * collective investments from both public and private sectors, including through the European Investment Bank; * investments in skills, training, and education; * an integrated single market for energy, finance, and telecommunications; * development of key technologies such as artificial intelligence, net-zero emission technologies, and semiconductors; * reducing harmful dependencies and strengthening supply chains; * advancing the green and digital transitions; * reforming the agricultural system; * enhancing cooperation in public health at both European and international levels.

In the field of security, the European Union aims to become a more capable and autonomous actor, especially through the strengthening of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Initiatives such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), BUS (Brussels-based Union Security), and the European Defense Fund are intended to stimulate defence cooperation among member states and reduce fragmentation in the European defence market (European External Action Service, 2024). Strategic autonomy does not imply a break from NATO, but rather an enhancement of Europe's capacity to act independently in its immediate neighborhood or in support of the transatlantic alliance.

For Romania, active participation in these structures represents both an opportunity to modernise its armed forces and national defence industry, and a political tool to influence the shaping of European security policies. As an active member involved in PESCO projects, Romania participates in initiatives concerning military mobility, the development of cyber defence and the training of military personnel. Furthermore, Romania benefits from financial support through the European Defense Fund to modernise its defence industry and to increase its own capabilities (European Defence Cooperation, 2025). In addition, Romania's engagement with initiatives developed under the SAFE (Security Action for Europe) framework further supports its efforts to strengthen defence capabilities by facilitating joint procurement, enhancing defence-industrial cooperation and improving access to financing for priority capability gaps. Participation in SAFE-related projects complements Romania's involvement in PESCO and the European Defense Fund, reinforcing military mobility, resilience and the sustainability of national and allied force structures within the broader European security architecture.

Beyond strictly military aspects, the EU Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029 emphasises the importance of broad societal resilience across European communities. This includes strengthening energy security, combating disinformation, protecting critical infrastructure, and developing digital autonomy. In all these areas, Romania benefits from financial and technological support but also bears the responsibility to adapt its domestic policies in order to fully leverage these resources. Thus, the EU is shaping up not only as a source of economic and regulatory security but also as an increasingly active player in defence and collective security. As a member state, Romania must integrate effectively into this effort, balancing its interests between the transatlantic orientation and the building of a more strategically capable Europe.

3. Points of Convergence and Divergence

Romania's relations with the United States of America and the European Union in the field of security are not conflicting, but rather complementary. According to the scientific military literature, *The European Union is a unique and essential partner for NATO, shares the same values, and plays complementary, coherent, and mutually reinforcing roles in supporting international peace and security. NATO and the EU will enhance the strategic partnership, strengthen political consultations and increase cooperation on issues of common interest, including the military field. Developing coherent and mutually reinforcing capabilities, while avoiding unnecessary duplications, are the key to joint efforts to make the*

Euro-Atlantic area safer. – NATO Strategic Concept, June 29, 2022, pp. 1, 10 (CERNAT, 2011 p. 128). However, differences in approach, pace, or priorities may arise between the two strategic frameworks, making the management of this balance essential for Bucharest. Currently, the Trump administration's vision is shifting toward a conditional stance, namely: either ending the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, or distancing the United States from the conflict in all aspects – diplomatic, logistical, etc. This approach stems from the fact that one of the new president's key objectives within his first 100 days in office is to end the Russia–Ukraine war, under the diplomatic direction of the U.S. administration. If this objective were to fail, it could signal the end of the era in which the United States positioned itself as the guarantor of international security. In such a scenario, Romania would find itself caught between the Strategic Partnership with the U.S. and the EU's foreign policy goals, which include continued support for Ukraine – aimed at securing a peace aligned with Ukraine's current national interests, including the preservation of its full territory (namely, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea).

3.1. Convergences

Both the U.S. and the EU regard the stability of the Black Sea region as a strategic objective. In this regard, Romania benefits from direct military support from the United States through the presence of U.S. troops and NATO infrastructure, while the EU invests in economic development, civil infrastructure, and regional resilience. Both entities support the modernisation of the Romanian army, the fight against hybrid threats, the protection of critical infrastructure, and the development of a national defence industry.

In the fields of cybersecurity and countering disinformation, Romania collaborates with the U.S. through bilateral and multilateral initiatives (e.g., within NATO), and also participates in EU rapid alert and response mechanisms in the event of cyberattacks or hostile influence campaigns. Romania also benefits from European expertise and funding to enhance its digital infrastructure and response capacities.

Another point of convergence is the shared support for Ukraine and the efforts to curb Russian influence in the region. Romania serves as a bridge between these two agendas, actively contributing humanitarian, economic, and military assistance to Kyiv.

3.2. Divergences

Nonetheless, divergences may emerge between the U.S. and the EU in terms of how strategic crises or priorities are addressed. For instance, while the U.S. maintains a global strategy focused on strategic competition with China and preserving its influence in the Indo-Pacific, the EU places greater emphasis on internal resilience, technological sovereignty, and strategic autonomy from all external actors, including, in certain respects, from the U.S. itself.

In this context, Romania may feel the pressure of aligning its defence and security policies with two centers of power that, although allied, do not always share the same priorities. For example, in military procurement or technological standardisation, Romania must navigate between American and European requirements.

Furthermore, European projects regarding green taxonomy, the energy transition, and digital regulations may sometimes clash with the more flexible U.S. approach in these areas. Here, Romania must adopt a pragmatic stance, capitalising on economic support from both directions without jeopardising its strategic relationships.

Managing these points of convergence and divergence requires an active, well-calibrated, and coherent foreign policy. Romania must strengthen its capacity to act as a mediator and integrator of Western interests in the region while maintaining a clear strategic vision of its own national interests.

4. Analysis and Perspectives for Romania

Between 2024 and 2029, Romania stands at a geopolitical turning point, where national security depends directly on the country's ability to simultaneously capitalise on transatlantic support and European integration. In recent years, Romania has emerged as a critical component of NATO's defence strategy in Eastern Europe, reflecting the shifting dynamics of global security and regional geopolitics (China CEE, 2024). Amid intensifying global strategic competition and emerging threats, ranging from conventional and hybrid warfare to cyberattacks and regional instability, Romania must adopt a coherent, proactive, and adaptable strategic approach.

Romania's geostrategic position presents both advantages and vulnerabilities. Located on the eastern border of NATO and the EU, Romania is both a frontier state of Western democracy and a security bastion for the entire Black Sea region. This position provides strategic benefits – such as access to vital resources and Western military and economic support – but also exposes the country to direct risks from the East. Therefore, Romania must continue investing in defence infrastructure, cybersecurity, and border protection.

Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and instability in the Republic of Moldova and the Western Balkans, Romania has the opportunity to become a regional security actor, promoting stability, democracy, and regional cooperation. Active involvement in Ukraine's reconstruction, support for the European path of the Republic of Moldova, and strengthening trilateral cooperation between Romania, Poland, and Ukraine can contribute to this strategic positioning.

Romania is also expected to consolidate its role within European integration and strategic partnerships – both with the United States and other European allies – by pursuing objectives such as: updating its National Defense Strategy to reflect post-2024 realities and aligning it with the new NATO and EU strategies; increasing investments in defence and military innovation in line with NATO commitments; strengthening internal resilience through integrated public policies on security education, countering disinformation, and protecting critical infrastructure; and continuously promoting a balanced and coherent diplomacy, capable of mediating and harmonising transatlantic and European interests.

Conclusions

Between 2024 and 2029, Romania's national security will increasingly be defined by the state's ability to efficiently navigate between the two poles of Western strategic support: the Strategic Partnership with the United States of America and the European Union's Strategic Agenda. For now, these two frameworks are not antagonistic, but complementary – each providing essential tools, resources, and mechanisms for defending national interests.

The strategic partnership with the United States remains the fundamental military security guarantee, offering vital operational, technological and political support for the defence of national territory and the projection of stability in the Black Sea region. At the same time, active membership in the European Union and integration into common defence and security policies open new opportunities for the modernisation of the armed forces, the development of the defence industry and the strengthening of internal resilience.

In this context, Romania's participation in the SAFE program represents a pragmatic mechanism for partially compensating structural capability gaps through joint procurement, industrial cooperation, and improved access to European financing, thereby strengthening national and allied defence readiness. However, a potential downsizing of the United States forces along NATO's Eastern European border, particularly within the framework of Operation Atlantic Resolve, would have significant strategic implications. Such a development would place increased pressure on European-led defence initiatives and national force generation, while amplifying Romania's responsibility to accelerate defence modernisation, enhance resilience and deepen its role as a security provider in the

Black Sea region. In this evolving strategic landscape, SAFE-type instruments can mitigate, but not fully substitute the deterrent and reassurance effect generated by the United States' military presence.

Romania must leverage this dual strategic anchoring through a balanced foreign policy, by consolidating its national defence capabilities and actively participating in regional and global initiatives aimed at ensuring stability and peace. The balance between transatlantic and European commitments does not mean choosing between two options, but rather synergistically utilising the advantages offered by both.

In conclusion, Romania's national security in the coming years will depend on the strategic coherence of internal and external political action, commitment to Western democratic values and the ability to build durable alliances in a profoundly uncertain international environment. Through a clear and strategic approach, Romania can become not only a beneficiary, but also a provider of security in the Euro-Atlantic space.

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