

# BULLETIN

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## Romania – A resilient state in the regional security equation. NRRP implementation

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak at the beginning of 2020 strongly affected the global economic, social and budgetary area, requiring an urgent and coordinated response both at the Union and Member State level to cope with the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic. In this article we pay particular attention to the evolution of the concept of resilience and the ways to strengthen the European states' resilience in the face of threats, especially following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, while analyzing the implementation state of the objectives outlined in Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The aim is to define the concept of resilience and to highlight the methods for increasing the European states' resilience, as well as to present how Romania applies European instruments to strengthen its national and regional resilience. Analyzing the preliminary data on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, it can be stated that Romania is making considerable efforts to strengthen its resilience and is on track to comply with the European Recovery and Resilience Mechanism measures.

### Keywords:

resilience; NRRP; COVID-19; Repower EU.

The concept of resilience can be defined as the ability of a society or state actors to withstand significant crises or shocks, protect critical areas, develop methods to counteract negative influences, and come back stronger. High resilience requires flexibility, resistance, and durability. Even though resilience is often associated with unforeseen situations, good planning and anticipation can lead to better results. A comprehensive analysis of vulnerabilities, risks, and threats to organizations, states, and citizens is necessary to avoid being unable to respond to them. Given the dynamic nature of the regional security environment, Romania is compelled to take all necessary measures to ensure political, economic, and security stability and to protect its citizens.

The strategic objectives for ensuring resilience in Romania are defined in the National Defence Strategy for the period 2020-2024: *“more than ever, resilience-building efforts must be calibrated to respond to new types of threats – subtle and subversive – including from technological developments. A central role is therefore given to multi-level collaboration: public-private, citizen-community and civil-military, aimed at strengthening societal resilience and critical infrastructures, a responsibility at the intersection of the social and individual, institutional-public and private spheres”* (Presidential Administration 2020).

Therefore, our analysis focuses on key aspects related to the concept of European and regional resilience, as well as the ways in which Romania demonstrates its resilience as a state in the face of regional security threats, especially in response to the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the purpose of our research, we accept the following hypothesis as the starting point of our study:

- ✓ *Romania is making considerable efforts to build resilience and it is on track to complying with the European Recovery and Resilience Mechanism measures.*

## **European Union Recovery and Resilience Mechanism**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in early 2020 severely affected the global economic, social and budgetary area, requiring an urgent and coordinated response at both Union and Member State level to address the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic. Following the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, on 27 May 2020, the European Commission proposed the creation of the temporary NextGenerationEU recovery instrument and the consolidation of EU funds for the period 2021-2027.

On 19 February 2021, the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, the main instrument of the NextGenerationEU initiative, entered into force. This mechanism, proposed by EU officials, comes as a solution against the negative impact of the COVID-19

pandemic, and is intended to help Europe recover and increase the resilience of Member States.

The scope of the mechanism covers policy areas of European importance structured around six pillars ([European Parliament 2021](#)):

- Pillar I, Green Transition, covers investments in the area of biodiversity, energy efficiency, building renovation in line with the Union's climate and energy security objectives.
- Digital transformation aims to develop digital infrastructures, digitise services and create data centres, encouraging the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.
- The area of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth aims at the recovery of the Union's economy. This pillar promotes entrepreneurship, sustainable infrastructures and industrial development.
- Based on social and territorial cohesion, Pillar IV aims to increase the quality of life, combat poverty and unemployment and lead to job creation, support and integrate disadvantaged groups or develop social protection systems.
- Pillar V, health and economic, social and institutional resilience, brings improvements in the area of public services, accessibility and capacity of the health system, effectiveness of national administration, judiciary.
- Pillar VI, policies for the next generation, children and youth, aims to achieve conclusive results on: digital skills, retraining, investment policies for children and youth on education, health and jobs, the generation gap.

The Recovery and Resilience Mechanism aims to improve the resilience, crisis response, and adaptation of Member States, as well as promote economic, social, and territorial cohesion through the green transition and digital transformation. The Mechanism's role is to provide financial support to achieve qualitative and quantitative results based on reforms, investments, and cooperation among EU countries.

Under this EU instrument, Member States have developed national resilience and recovery plans that outline specific measures, reforms, and investment projects needed to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis. To benefit from the support provided through the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, these reforms and investments must be implemented by 2026.

### **Implementation of Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan**

In the current global geopolitical context, where unpredictability and dynamism are predominant, we believe that Romania must respond promptly to new security challenges, take the best measures to counter them and adopt anticipation as its main line of action.

The National Defence Strategy for the period 2020-2024 states as follows: *”The concept of Romania’s resilience is addressed in two key aspects: the inherent capacity of entities – individuals, communities, regions, state - to resist and adapt articulately to violent events, causing stress, shock, disasters, pandemics or conflicts, on the one hand, and the capacity of these entities to quickly return to a functional state of normality, on the other hand”* ([Presidential Administration 2020](#)).

It can therefore be said that our state is treating this concept responsibly, and it is necessary to continue to work towards economic, social and political stability, in conjunction with limiting the latest risks and threats generated by the realities of the 21st century, marked by various crisis situations, so that its citizens are protected.

In application of EU measures and directives on resilience, Romania developed Romania’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) in April 2021, a strategic document *”which underpins the reform priorities and investment areas at national level for the establishment of the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism”* ([Romanian Government 2021](#)) through timetables, targets, indicators, detailed budgets and implementation charts. The plan has been broken down into several components, in line with the directions for action outlined by the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, as shown in the table below:

**TABLE 1 PNRR Components**  
(Achieved according to the data obtained from NRRP Monitor, accessed on 09.12.2022, <https://monitorpnrr.eu/>)

Co no	Pillar	Component
1.	Transition to a green economy	Water management
2.		Forests and biodiversity protection
3.		Waste management
4.		Sustainable transport
5.		The wave of renewal
6.		Energy
7.	Digital transformation	Digital transformation
8.	Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth	Tax and pension reform
9.		Support for the private sector, research, development and innovation
10.	Social and territorial cohesion	Local fund
11.		Tourism and culture
12.	Health and institutional resilience	Health
13.		Social reforms
14.		Good governance
15.	Education	Education and skills for children and youth

In this context, we asked ourselves whether Romania is capable of fulfilling the tasks assumed in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Upon analysing the document, we can see that Romania has addressed all the objectives outlined in the European Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, including green transition, investments in the digital process and smart growth, health, economic and institutional pillars, as well as care for future generations. This has resulted in a detailed analysis of the identified problems and proposals for short- and medium-term solutions covering each area.

The European Union has set 507 targets and milestones under this instrument, translated into measures, reforms and investments under this instrument, which Romania must meet by 2026. The funds earmarked for our country amount to €29.18 billion, with grants accounting for €14.23 billion and loans for €14.94 billion.

The European Commission's Recommendation from May 2022 on Romania's National Reform Programme for 2022, which includes a Council Opinion on Romania's Convergence Programme for 2022, acknowledges the progress Romania has made in this respect and proposes that Romania should continue its efforts to ([European Commission 2022a](#)):

- implement its Recovery and Resilience Plan in line with agreed milestones and targets;
- implement fiscal-budgetary policies with a view to ending Romania's excessive public deficit;
- reduce dependence on fossil fuels;
- develop renewable energy sources;
- modernize transport networks;
- interconnect with neighbouring EU countries;
- set more ambitious targets for energy efficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> Press releases of the Ministry of Investments and European Projects and of the Romanian Government, accessed during September-December 2022, at: <https://mfe.gov.ro/> and <https://gov.ro/>.

According to data released by the Romanian Government<sup>1</sup>, Romania has already received two pre-financing tranches for the implementation of the NRRP, totalling approximately €3.79 billion in December 2021 and January 2022. Romania reached all 21 targets and milestones set for 2021, and the first payment request of €2.6 billion was paid by the European Commission on 22 October 2022.

In the first half of 2022, Romania had 51 objectives and milestones to meet, which were successfully achieved, meaning that on 15 December 2022, the second payment request, amounting to €3,227,690,000, was sent to the European Commission for approval. At the same time, the third payment request, worth €3.1 billion, will be submitted by Romania in the first quarter of next year, based on the 79 milestones and targets with deadlines in the third and fourth quarters of 2022. In total, Romania committed to achieving 151 targets and milestones from the start of the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan till the end of 2022.

In the same vein, the European RePowerEU instrument ([European Commission 2022b](#)) should also be mentioned, which is of major relevance in the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans drawn up by the EU Member States. In the context of the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine at the beginning of 2022, European energy security is strongly affected, so the European Union has created this mechanism with a view to

achieving energy independence (bearing in mind that many European countries are dependent on Russian gas). The plan aims to save energy, produce green energy and diversify energy sources, and includes short and medium-term measures.

One of the relevant measures adopted under this plan, to be completed by 2027, concerns the integration of the *RePowerEU* facility into the National Recovery and Resilience Plans. Given that the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism is the European Union's main instrument for accessing *RePowerEU* funds, the need has arisen to update Member States' Recovery and Resilience Plans in line with the measures required by the *RePowerEU* plan, so that each country must include a chapter dedicated to *RePowerEU* in its National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

The Ministry of Energy's press release of 28 November 2022 states that "*The Ministry of Investment and European Projects, as national coordinator of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, together with the Ministry of Energy and other relevant institutions in the field, is focusing its efforts on the development of a new chapter of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, REPowerEU, aimed at ensuring Romania's energy independence through the use of energy produced from renewable sources [...] to increase its energy independence, Romania will receive non-reimbursable financial support of around €1.4 billion*" ([Ministry of Energy 2022](#)). Thus, we can see that Romania respects and promotes European values and directives, while constantly working to make the most of these opportunities and achieve the highest possible take-up of European funds.

At the European Parliament sitting of 14.02.2023, the *European Parliament Legislative Resolution of 14 February 2023 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2021/241 as regards the REPowerEU chapters of the Recovery and Resilience Plans and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 was adopted, Directive 2003/87/EC and Decision (EU) 2015/1814 (COM(2022)0231 - C9-0183/2022 - 2022/0164(COD))* ([European Parliament 2023](#)), it has therefore become official that within two months of the entry into force of the regulation Romania must submit to the European forum its chapter related to the *RePowerEU* instrument within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, a rather short deadline, which remains to be seen whether our state is able to meet.

Romania must consider in the drafting of the chapter dedicated to *RePowerEU* the recommendations of the European Parliament which have as their main objective the fight against energy poverty for the vulnerable and the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as the reduction of energy demand. This should ultimately result in lower costs for households and small businesses. Another important measure provides for transparency of final recipients, so that Romania will have to publish twice a year a list of "*the 100 final recipients receiving the highest amount of funding for the implementation of measures under the mechanism*" ([European Parliament 2023](#)).

Therefore, we can say that the new directions of action regarding the update of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan are a challenge for the decision-makers in the Romanian government. There is a need for a general mobilization among politicians at both central and local level to achieve these objectives imposed by the European Parliament, otherwise Romania risks losing an important opportunity to attract new European funds.

## Conclusions

In essence, we believe that in order to strengthen national resilience, both economically, socially and in terms of ensuring national and regional security, it is necessary for Romania to practice public policies and adopt necessary measures against hostile actions orchestrated by various state and non-state actors, to facilitate partnership between the authorities and the population and to take steps such as:

- supporting and introducing new educational programmes to raise awareness of the dangers of spreading false information;
- a sustained effort on the part of central public authorities to reveal the sources of misinformation and to explain in detail, in a comprehensible manner, the negative aspects of the dissemination of data obtained from these sources, and subsequently to expose publicly the factors behind these sources;
- increasing public awareness of hostile activities in the online environment and stopping fake news with the hidden role of undermining regional security, by promoting and developing methods of educating the population in both the public and private spheres (courses, dissemination of official information, cooperation between the population and government institutions, etc.);
- educating the population from an early age about actions that destabilise national and regional security and their negative effects;
- reducing the 'brain drain' and creating attractive working environments for intellectuals;
- promoting information activities at both institutional and public level on the importance of critical infrastructure in ensuring security (medical system, water supply, electricity, transport, etc.) and the need to protect it more effectively;
- building and developing policy instruments and decisions in line with national security interests and objectives;
- complying with and promoting European measures on methods of ensuring a balance between the socio-economic aspect and the efficient management of natural resources;
- stimulating economic performance and ensuring Romania's financial stability;
- supporting the proper functioning of the fundamental systems for the protection of citizens and national security;
- developing the education and research system to ensure international performance.

We believe that it is necessary to develop this concept because the recent evolution of the types of threats runs counter to past times characterised by a more or less sustainable security, in which the risk of major crises was relatively low, in the sense that a concrete solution to limit the negative impact is resilience.

On the current issue, we believe that the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism proposed by the European Union will help to repair the damage caused by the crisis and prepare a better future for the next generations. The Mechanism must ensure Europe's sustainable development and build a more resilient society in the face of new challenges. At the same time, it should be recalled that so far Romania has successfully met the requirements for the realisation and implementation of the NRRP, having the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment as regards state resilience by also completing the directives on the RePowerEU chapter on time. Considering what is listed in this study, we consider that the **hypothesis established is validated**, namely: *Romania is making considerable efforts to strengthen resilience and is on track to comply with the European measures on the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism.*

In our opinion, it is of paramount importance to develop the political dialogue between all the entities involved in order to assess and analyse the recovery and resilience plans. As long as each state actor has an integrated approach, aligned with the Union's objectives, the common effort will be rewarded and the desired results will certainly be achieved.

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