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**ROMANIA WITHIN THE REGIONAL SECURITY  
ENVIRONMENT**

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**Abstract:**

Understanding Romania's regional role must be correlated with understanding other actors' purposes and interests in the region, for this comprehension is tightly connected to geopolitical control and advantages. Therefore, Romania must display carefully and diplomatically these issues in order to harmonize its national and regional interests and play an active role in the decision-making process within European and Euro-Atlantic bodies.

*Key words: security, stability, frozen armed conflicts, threats, risks, South-Eastern Europe.*

**1. Introduction**

Romania's geopolitical position plays a pivotal role in supporting its national security in a coherent manner in south-eastern Europe. The actions and measures taken by the Romanian state concerning the conflicts taking place in the Balkan Peninsula, Moldavia and Georgia have been strong arguments in favor of Romania's accession to NATO and EU.

Due to its position at the border of NATO and EU, in the western part of the Black Sea and the Danube River, Romania has been a gate to the European and transatlantic world as well as the Euro-Asian arena.

**2. Risks and Interests Areas around Romania**

The geostrategic phenomenon of globalization places Romania at the crossroad of outstanding geopolitical and geostrategic developments, which comprise various and major risk factors to our country's security. These developments occur in our proximity and pertain mainly to central Europe, Balkan area, Black Sea neighborhood and the Community of Independent States (CIS).

CIS has been undergoing a process of national clarifications due to the diversity of its components – territorial, ethnic, religious, economic and social, which is proved by the perpetuation of the frozen conflicts in Transnistria and Caucasus. In spite of its economic and political challenges, Russia has made use of diplomacy and nuclear potential, which has maintained its role as almost exclusive world power, with a clear emphasis on its intention to preserve influence and control for over 50 years in an area situated in the close vicinity of the empire.

On the other hand, the central European area has proved its propensity for regional prosperity by involving the main global geopolitical and geostrategic actors. The region is

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quasi-entirely integrated in the Euro-Atlantic security system, as well as the EU system. Then, the Balkan region is still affected by the frozen conflicts of the former Yugoslavia, which have been aggravated by the current economic crisis.

The Black Sea area is also both an opportunity and a risk source, for it is placed at the confluence of two strategic directions: Black Sea – Caucasus – Caspian Sea, which is the passing corridor of the resources from central Asia to Europe, where frozen conflicts still exist fostered by Russia. The second is the Black Sea – Mediterranean Sea, which has a strategic importance for NATO, but is affected by cross-border threats<sup>1</sup>.

The interests to promote Romania's national security under these tense circumstances are subject to phenomena such as: existence of destabilizing and uncontrolled forces and equipment in Romania's strategic interest space, high likelihood of uncontrolled dissemination of nuclear technologies and equipment, weapons of mass destruction, unconventional lethal materials, perpetuation of economic, financial and social difficulties around Romania's territory, development of terrorist groups and transnational organized crime (economic-financial crime, illegal people trafficking, drug dealing etc.), limited access to vital resources that transit the area, all of which lead to separatist trends, intolerance, xenophobia, ethnic and religious conflicts, as well as huge migration among populations affected by these events.

These scenarios lead to the following conclusion: the development in Romania's interests and risks is tightly connected to the geopolitical and geostrategic areas dominated by latent and even open conflicts, as well as Russia strategic interests regarding the borders of NATO, EU and former Soviet republics.

### **2. Security in Romania's Proximity Area**

The collapse of the global geostrategic bipolar balance in the early 90s and the rapid extension of NATO and EU have radically changed European geo-policy. Almost instantly, south-eastern Europe has drawn global actors' attention due to its diversity and integration efforts. The interest in this area is determined and promoted by various world and European actors, for the security void created in that period transformed it into an unstable arena due to political, military, ethnic, religious and economic factors. Afterwards, the military balance has been redefined. Thus, Georgia's and Ukraine's refusal expressed in the Treaty of Tashkent in 1992 compromised the CIS regional domination, whereas NATO presence in south-eastern Europe has repositioned the Alliance's southern wing into a Black Sea element. Currently, we are witnessing a strategic reconsideration of EU and NATO attitude towards this area.

The security status around Romania is dictated both by global and regional evolutions and its own interests. The frozen conflicts born at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will continue to exist and will certainly gain new valences and dimensions. This is sustained by the present evolutions from the western Balkans, Transnistria, Caucasus and Cyprus, and the weak measures taken in order to solve the problems have not been effective. The extension of the Kosovo conflict beyond Serbian borders and the rapid spread of security instability into Macedonia and Bosnia Herzegovina is an extra argument in this respect. To the east, the conflict of Transnistria is boiling fueled by the western security bodies' lack of determination and Russia's well delineated interests. Moreover, our country's security is directly affected by Caucasian phenomena and by the two strategy

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and energy competition in the Black Sea area accompanied by a significant development of military infrastructure.

The profile of the security state in south-eastern Europe, that is, around Romania as well are the consequences of the regional states' belligerent potential and geostrategic sensitive issues, which is illustrated by vulnerabilities, crises and conflicts, power distribution and foe-or-friend relationships. The last aspect is difficult to quantify in terms of stability and cooperation for it is sustained exclusively by modernization and democratization, application of fundamental human rights and European democratic values.

The uneven level of economic development in the region, the social and political differences, the ethnic and religious rivalries, the continuation of local territorial disputes contribute to the complex regional threats. The increase or decrease in some of these threats is the result of some states' application of NATO and EU principles or, on the contrary, the lack of coherence in the clarification of other states' strategic choices. Mention should be made that the regional distribution of power proves the NATO and EU economic and military superiority, but one should never disregard Russia's significant military potential in the area. Under these circumstances, the south-eastern European challenges are posed by external conflicts and tensions, international terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, organized crime, people trafficking, weapons and drug dealing, nuclear materials trafficking, and illegal migration of people.

*"People change, state institutions change, ideas dominating mankind change, but the great regional issues remain the same"*<sup>2</sup>. If one examines carefully the geopolitical and geostrategic developments of the last two decades, one will notice that the collapse of the Soviet monopoly has offered new opportunities to the countries in the region. Also, military threats of outstanding magnitude have diminished, whereas non-military threats have increased tremendously, including frozen conflicts. At the same time, Romania's surrounding regions have become a front line between EU, which is a security provider, and the extra-union conglomerate, which is a source of insecurity. One may argue that this distribution is underpinned by two contradictory trends: the gradual inclusion of these states in NATO and EU, on the one hand, and Russia's effort to create and consolidate a political, economic and military body in the former Soviet area, in which Romania is geographically included.

From a geo-economic point of view, south-eastern Europe is shaped both by the former communist period and by the new historical trends, i.e., it is still linked to the Soviet economy and depends on the Soviet energy sources – just like most parts of Europe, which generates significant vulnerabilities. This leads to strategic disputes over the transportation routes between Russia, transit countries and global power actors having vested interests in the region. On the other hand, that is, embracing the EU realities, most south-eastern countries depend on the western support in order to stimulate the economic, social and democratic processes. Thus, some dysfunctions occur due to the old mentalities and lack of democratic traditions accompanied by the state authorities' inefficiency in fighting corruption, organized crime, illegal trafficking of people, weapons and drugs. Also, the uneven economic development of these countries has a counterproductive effect on western investors. However, one may notice that over the past two decades, regional and global institutions have actively engaged in supporting and strengthening south-eastern Europe's security by means of stimulating economic stability and progress.

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<sup>2</sup> Nicolae IORGA, *Rostul națiunii române*, în revista *Neamul românesc*, nr. 2, 1911, p. 24.

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The current security environment around Romania is characterized by globalization, EU and NATO integration, as well as instability. The regional community is fully aware of this. In order to overcome these challenges, it considers permanently adopting and adapting assessment and monitoring methods, as well as developing capabilities meant to adequately react in time and space. Thus, the countries in the region have taken steps to consolidate the continental and regional security environment: the positive developments in the NATO and EU relations with Russia, Ukraine and Georgia, and the amplification of the Mediterranean Dialogue enhance dialogue and cooperation. Our country's contribution to the south-eastern Europe's stability is sustained by its position as a south NATO wing and its proximity to the frozen conflict area of former Yugoslavia, near and middle East. The political, economic and military interests from southern Caucasus and Central Asia have increased the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of south-eastern area both Europe-wide and worldwide.

The military security around Romania and its strategic area of interests has evolved since the first wave of NATO extension, when the new democracies from central and eastern Europe became allies for the purpose of preventing and overcoming threats against the international and NATO community. Once the general situation in the region has improved and changed from an open ethnic-religious conflict into a stable post-conflict one, one may notice the unquestionable presence of non-conventional threats. The impossibility to control organized crime has led to creating routes crossing the southern part of Russia, which has spread into the entire area with all the entailed negative consequences.

Another aspect worth considering is that south-eastern Europe is a well delineated security structure from a geography and civilization point of view – mainly orthodox with some catholic and Islamic interferences. State-wise, the area is fragmented into small states, according to various criteria (Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia Herzegovina, Cyprus, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, Moldavia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey). After many political tensions and efforts, Voivodina has been granted self-administration rights, whereas Montenegro and Kosovo have separated from the federation. Transnistria undergoes a similar process, and Cyprus has been placed under UN control and divided into two regions: Turkish and Greek. The conflicts of Georgia (Abkhazia and Ossetia) are fueled by Russian hegemony trends overcome by the world's public opinion.

The regional security environment in this region is the result of centuries of accumulated tensions of an economic, cultural, ethnic, religious and nations nature. These countries are aware of these realities and therefore try to integrate in the EU and NATO bodies. Also, here there are numerous regional organizations. Unfortunately, the transition process accompanied by the frozen conflicts has led to economic discrepancies, which fueled latent conflicts. Therefore, the international community realized that solving the region's frozen conflicts had to be approached simultaneously with two other aspects: security and economic development.

Currently, the south-eastern European geopolitical and geostrategic zone – where the great European powers confronted (Germany, Russia, Britain and France) followed by the two post- World War II superpowers (USA and USSR) – is refining the process of economic, political and military restructuring that started more than twenty years ago. USA and NATO control most of the local evolutions in an attempt to prevent, stop and manage all the armed conflicts and political tensions, as well as to support south-eastern countries'

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democratization and development of market economy for the purpose of full integration in the regional, EU and NATO integration.

### **3. Conclusions**

We hereby consider that south-eastern Europe may be regarded as a security puzzle within which historical, economic, political, military and cultural interactions act and make the area a heterogeneous system of values. At the present moment, it is a cooperation and competition zone from USA, EU, NATO, Russia, China, Germany and France, although one should not ignore the ever growing role of Turkey. Furthermore, the state constructions have not ended, which increases insecurity due to imperial trends on the one hand, and expansion of EU and NATO values on the other hand. It is obvious, however, that EU and NATO have no intention to remove or isolate Russia from the region's equation of power distribution, but include it in the system of international relationships based on security, trust and cooperation instead.

From a geostrategic viewpoint, the situation remains complex. The realities around Romania fuel the tensions and frozen conflicts from the western Balkans, Moldavia, Caucasus and eastern Mediterranean area, whose solutions are not yet to be foreseen. At the same time, the geostrategic phenomena include people, arms and drug trafficking, which calls for the involvement of important regional actors in the process of decision-making.

Romania's accession to NATO and EU has brought a significant military component to the Alliance by consolidating stability and security in the Balkans to the Black Sea and Caucasus, as well as by taking steps to the peaceful and sustainable conflict of Transnistria in the Republic of Moldavia. The complementary process of EU integration in a functional economic, political, social, and military system will result in the enhancement of democratic values and prosperity in the extended EU. In its turn, Romania will pursue its strategic interests in the area, will strengthen its position within NATO, will play a significant role in building security in central and south-eastern Europe, will support democracy building in the neighboring countries and will consolidate its position as a security and democracy provider.

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