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**THE NEED FOR A STRATEGY AND ROMANIA’S
STRATEGIC INTEREST IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE**

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Abstract:

After more than a decade since the beginning of the 21st century, the countries of the south-eastern Europe (SEE) are engaged in a medium and short-term process of social modernization at different stages due to the unprecedented mutations occurring within the extremely diverse and dynamic international context. The internal evolutions specific to reform and transition accompanied by external participation in achieving the new European defense and security architecture pose new, complex and supplementary challenges to the countries in the region concerning their development and integration, but also real opportunities resulting from the collective defense and security system. The subsequent requirements call for a common vision on the regional strategy meant to prove useful in supporting the national and regional political factors to assume all the responsibilities for collective security and defense. It is clear, however, that the political engagement must permanently benefit from the unconditional support of the civil society.

Key words: security, strategic interest, South-Eastern Europe Strategy

1. Introduction

The foundation of the states’ security should be the citizen’s safety and well being, whereas democracy, cooperation and integration will guarantee the sound collective security and defense. At the same time, by protecting the national values and identity along with the assurance of necessary resources, economic, social, cultural and military program, every society will meet the development and performance needs of the united Europe. It is only in this context that SSE can become stable, strong, prosperous, and able to actively and adequately meet today’s challenges of collective defense and tomorrow’s uncertainties. Thus, every SEE country redefines its national interests according to the EU integration processes. Then, the national interests will provide the society with prosperity and safety, on the one hand, and the state with stability, security and democracy, on the other hand. *“Between 2001–2011, the region’s degree of security decreased to manageable levels, taking into consideration that the main international actors had both the intention and the capacity to identify and overcome the conflicts”¹.* This characteristic

¹. FRUNZETI, Teodor, ZODIAN, Vladimir – coordonatori, *Lumea 2011. Enciclopedie politic i militar . Studii strategice i de securitate*, Editura CTEA, Bucure ti, 2011, p.134

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of the current SEE environment is an extra argument favoring a SEE strategy developed by SEE people.

Essentially, a SEE strategy serving both every state entity and the system as a whole guarantees stability, democracy, fundamental rights, multilateral development, NATO and EU political and economic integration.

2. A Strategy for *See* Security?

SEE has always had a geopolitical and geostrategic relevance in the years that followed the radical social and political transformations of the last decade of the 20th century. Its placing at the confluence of three outstandingly important regions – the Balkans, Caucasus and Asia, as well as in the proximity of the Middle East makes it one of the world's buffer zones. Moreover, it is the cross point of four geostrategic communication routes: the Danube River, the Aegean Sea, Caucasus and the Nile River. At the same time, SEE is the southern wing of NATO that borders northern Russia, which makes it a potential confrontation zone for the world's great powers' interests. Also, SEE position on the foreseen routes of oil and gas pipes from the Caspian and central Asian regions to the western consumers makes the importance of this region even greater in the context of the energy resources control worldwide. Then, the Black Sea ensures the neighboring countries access to the planetary ocean, and Russia's easiest way to the warm seas in the south and Suez to the east.

As a transit zone between Europe and Asia, SEE is an important way to a major part of the illegal arms, people and drug dealing as well as illegal immigration from central Asia and Middle East to the west.

The economic importance of the area must also be highlighted. The significant natural resources of the three adjacent seas – the Adriatic Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Black Sea – are accompanied by industrial, commercial and tourism facilities, extended networks of airports, maritime and river harbors that can support the world's trade traffic. Also, a thorough analysis of the regional relationships shows that SEE provides various elements of interstate cooperation: economic, technical-scientific, cultural and military. Last but not least, the region is a huge market of over 400 million consumers, has a great demographic and economic potential and cheap and highly qualified labor force.

Under the aforementioned circumstances, the competition among SEE countries has increased dramatically over the last twenty years and even reached critical levels. The cause of these contradictions is the exploitation and transportation of strategic raw materials from the production regions to the consumers. The extinction of the USSR led to an increase in the commercial-political competition over the huge sources of energy from the new Caucasian states and from central Asia, that is, control over Euro-Asia. The stake is always the same: power, wealth, influence, control of security and stability by means of regional conflicts turned into frozen conflicts, political instability and fierce competition in the multinational companies' arena. Furthermore, the Caspian territories that own most of the resources belong to continental states that rely on their neighbors for the access to the western markets. Thus, SEE becomes an important and necessary transit zone for the oil products. Consequently, the new geopolitical competition from the central Asia has a two-fold determination resulting from the control over the oil and gas production accompanied by the transportation of these products to the western markets. In this way, the context becomes favorable to both parties, that is, SEE and central Asia. There are projects related

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to transporting the Caspian oil via SEE, over the Black Sea, by using a combined method – cargo and oil pipe, such as:

➤ Suapsa (Novorossysk) – Burgas (Bulgaria) – Alexandroupolis (Greece). The countries that expressed their interest in accomplishing this project are: Greece, Bulgaria, Russia, Georgia and Japan. The project stipulates transporting the Caspian oil by ships to Burgas and then via the oil pipe to Alexandroupolis, and then reloaded on ships. Thus, the passing of the supertankers through the Bosphorus straight is avoided. The pipeline will be 300 km long and will have a 35-50 million ton per annum.

➤ Suapsa – Constanta – Trieste (Italy). The states that expressed their interest in this project are: Romania, Italy, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Slovenia. The oil pipe (Constanta – Trieste) with a total length of 1,360 km will start in Constanta harbor and will cross Serbia and Croatia. The pipe route will continue to Trieste, where it will be connected to the *Trans Alpine Pipeline* – TAP, which supplies Austria and Germany. Another junction will ensure the transport to Venice in order to supply the refineries from northern Italy. The oil pipeline will facilitate the oil transport from the Black Sea to the European market and will have a capacity of 12 million tons of oil per annum.

➤ Suapsa – Odessa (Ukraine) – Gdansk (Poland). The countries that expressed their interest in this project are: Ukraine, Georgia and Poland.

➤ The trans-Balkan pipeline Burgas-Vlora is the result of the three-party Memorandum signed by Bulgaria, Albania and the FYROM.

The transportation of natural gas also involves various projects meant to build gas pipelines: one between Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, and one under the sea between Crimea and Turkey. There is also a pipeline between Russia and Greece which crosses the territory of Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria via which Russia intends to transport more gas to Greece. Then, the Nabucco project has been developed for a unique source of gas from Russia. It involves building a pipeline that takes gas from the Caspian region and transports it to Germany and Italy via Turkey, Romania, Hungary and Austria.

Today's realities demonstrate that all the bordering countries are interested in transporting the natural resources from the Caspian Sea one way or another. One can also notice that the western actors' interest in exploiting and transporting Caspian oil has led to their involvement in solving the issues related to the funding and building the pipeline and the political projects meant to assure the entire area's stability and democracy. This interest is justified by various factors such as: the heterogeneous and complex nature of the strategic, political, social and economic choices of the component states, the interests of the rest of global and regional actors, the hypothetical SSE perspectives in the context of globalization, as well as the region's importance in the world's stability and security. Consequently, it is clear that the area displays phenomena such as: political neo-expansionism, consolidation of international stability and security with an emphasis on SEE, increasing control over energy sources and their distribution, maximizing the opportunities of democratic exposure of people's will – all of these being accomplished by various procedures of diplomatic, political, economic, cultural, military and even religious nature performed by global, regional, state, non-state, government and non-government actors. For instance, from the viewpoint of the strategic interests in the current security context, Washington supports the NATO power center to the east. As a result, the American administration pays special attention to the relation with SEE given their proximity to the Caspian, central Asia, Mediterranean and Middle East areas, which is

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where the main threats to the Euro-Atlantic security come. After 9-11, there have NATO opinions according to which the Alliance's extension should be stopped for a while. The American officials' answer was against this trend, as the former Secretary of State Collin Powell stated: *"The events of September 11 have consolidated the importance of tight cooperation and integration between USA and all the European democracies. If the US want to overcome the new challenges and threats to national security, they must build the strongest and largest possible coalition of countries that share our values and can act efficiently together. Why do we need NATO? What does this Alliance not disappear? The answer is clear: everybody wants to join this club... They want to be a part of a political and security organization which is anchored in its relationship with North America"*².

Nowadays, the SEE geopolitical and geostrategic trends takes various shapes such as: manifestation of a regional role resulted from the management of its own power (Greece, Turkey, Ukraine) or from its belonging to a global power center (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia), embedding its own project in the geopolitical and geostrategic development projects (NATO, Russia, USA, EU), large survival and consolidation actions (Bosnia Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Republic of Moldavia), freezing the local conflicts, their economic, ideological, political and military valuing for the purpose of managing national interests (Bosnia Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, FYROM, Transnistria).

All these developments, realities, actions, initiatives or projects emphasized so far depend on the SEE security, but this area is still experiencing conflict situations. However, the importance of NATO's right wing is growing. Taken into consideration its frozen conflicts as well as the neighborhood of conflict areas of the Middle East, SEE has acted as a buffer in the context of the non-conventional threats posed there. The unpredictable and dynamic nature of the asymmetric threats calls for the cooperation of all the SEE countries, regardless of their being a member of a military or non-military organization or not. Thus, the need for controlling and eradicating terrorism has determined the NATO allies to align their objectives in order to strengthen the southern wing of the Alliance, which is the gate to the areas that generate most threats to the Euro-Atlantic security.³

Now more than ever, Europe displays the conditions for sustainable stability. EU can successfully act, too, particularly with regard to the frozen conflicts of SEE by means of crisis management. Thus, regional and European common security is the best way to protect the SEE countries' interests. Therefore, the only option to ensure security and stability in order to consolidate democracy and prosperity is the full Euro-Atlantic integration. Being EU and NATO members guarantees security in a geopolitical area where instability, risks and threats occur on a permanent basis.

In this context, we consider that the project of a united and democratic Europe cannot be accomplished without SEE. Europe's security is inevitably linked to SEE security, as the SEE problems are interdependent. Therefore, common efforts to develop such projects are imperiously necessary, in spite of the fact that SEE continues to be a volatile zone requiring a clear strategy to encourage and sustain positive evolutions.

² Terry, TERRIFF, Stuart, CROFT, Elke, KRAHMANN, Mark, WEBBER, Jolyon, HOWORTH, "NATO's next enlargement", în *International Affairs*, Vol.78, nr.4/ October 2002, SUA, Blackwell Publishers, pag. 713-731.

³ Stuart, CROFT, „Guaranteeing Europe's security? Enlarging NATO again”, în *International Affairs*, Vol.78, nr.1/ January 2002, SUA, Blackwell Publishers, pag. 97-115.

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3. Romania's Strategic Interest in South-Eastern Europe

Our country's geographic location is extremely favorable. It offers Romania the opportunity to control terrestrial and water communication routes that connect the Balkans to northern and central Europe, as well as eastern Europe and the Black Sea – the 4th European corridor. The temperate-continental climate favors balanced life conditions, free from extreme phenomena, the soil allows for the development of agriculture, whereas the Carpathians and the extended network of rivers support the whole picture. Geographically speaking, Romania is in SEE and plays a pivotal role in strengthening NATO's right wing. Therefore, SEE can block two energy routes: one from the east to the west, from the Middle East – the Caspian Sea – central Asia, and one from the west to the east, from the security provider, that is, NATO to the security consumer, that is, Caucasus – Middle East – central Asia.

All these aspects offers Romania an extremely important role in SEE and not only. Thus, Romania has special partnerships with Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece after its NATO and EU accession, and by bilateral and multilateral relationships with its neighbors. The administration of Bucharest considers that our country has entered the stage of democratic alignment to the Euro-Atlantic standards in two major directions: democratic expansion and eradication of terrorism. Also, Romania regards SEE as outstandingly important to the Euro-Atlantic community, which calls for a strategy to ensure stability, security, and prosperity in the area. This approach starts from the idea that, for the first time in history, SEE countries formed a community based on common interests and shared values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and war on terrorism.

The realities, trends and political-military evolutions in SEE show that Romania lies at the crossroad of American, Russian and German interests, which fuels national fears and minorities' separation trends. At the same time, Romania is close to two instability regions, where frozen conflicts still thrive. Our country does not bridge these zones, as it provides stability and crisis management instead. One can argue that Romania's relations with these actors will evolve, whereas the likelihood of armed aggression against Romania in the near future is inexistent.

Starting from the idea that Romania belongs to SEE, our country promotes its national interests by exerting its role as a regional power according to our Strategy of National Security and National Defense Strategy. The national interests are historically generated and become European interests. Thus, Romanian foreign policy considers that SEE security is important to its own national interests, and invites the Euro-Atlantic community to take part in this process. This approach is somehow against Russian and Turkish viewpoints, which argue that the countries of this area have enough potential to provide SEE security and stability. At the same time, Romania perceives the area as one of significant geostrategic opportunities, which places it at the core of every dynamic geopolitical process. According to all the countries in this area shared by the entire Euro-Atlantic community, a concrete solution is becoming more and more viable. As an important piece of this puzzle, Romania is directly interested in SEE development alongside NATO and EU by actively involving in the process of building a united Europe. The endeavors comprise fighting the following: perpetuation of frozen conflicts, political manifestations that undermine governments, illegal trafficking of weapons, drugs and people, organized crime, and extremism. Romanian diplomacy has openly expressed

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interest and support for regional cooperation and solidarity and increase the EU actions in SEE, which will make extensive use of Romania's being located in a nodal point of the global, NATO and EU businesses. Moreover, the Romanian interests aim at taking common action to express functional solidarity and common vision open to all the stakeholders.

As a SEE element and by its geopolitical, geo-economic, demographic and cultural potential, Romania is an important actor that cannot be ignored in any geostrategic strategy based on open or hidden interests in this area. Romania promotes its interests on the grounds of EU and NATO partnership and loyalty. From this point of view, SEE is perceived as a part of the global geopolitical arena due to its features such as: responsible external involvement of SEE countries in ensuring democratic stability and prosperity in Middle East, fostering efficient cooperation between USA and EU in an area where the interests of the two parties are complementary, responsible contribution to enhancing the Alliance's capacity to engage in operations outside its territory, Russia's positive involvement as a stable and predictable neighbor, encouraging economic and steady economic progress of the SEE countries. Consequently, Romania's intention and vocation is to assume a role of stability and democracy provider by stating and enhancing the EU values in the region. In this respect, we promote our national interests by valuing economic opportunities, developing economic cooperation and maritime infrastructure in the entire zone by means of cooperation with all the countries in order to assure strategic energy transportation routes from Caucasus – Caspian area to the west. From a cultural point of view, Romania has often expressed its interest in using cultural diversity as a tool to solve frozen conflicts and tensions and to protect the national and regional cultural heritage in order to preserve national identities in the wider context of a united Europe. At a social-cultural level, Romania encourages regional cooperation in the field of education by promoting the reform of educational systems and standards, as well as promoting and sustaining adequate policies to increase prosperity and living standards of SEE citizens, decreasing unemployment and eradicating poverty in a wider context of health system development.

From a different stance, Romania's strategic interest is accompanied by issues related to the Black Sea and Danube River. Our country's connection to the Planetary Ocean is due to these two factors, which is a highly valuable strategic advantage. Under these circumstances, Romania pays great attention to: assuring raw materials by means of maritime and fluvial routes, exploiting sea and undersea resources, developing and protecting economic interests related to the sea and rivers, preserving its territorial integrity within its present terrestrial, maritime and fluvial borders, ensuring fluvial access to the Black Sea area, preserving freedom of circulation on fluvial and maritime routes, protecting maritime and fluvial infrastructure, protecting the natural environment of rivers, Black Sea and Danube Delta, preventing actions meant to obstruct maritime and fluvial navigation.

The appearance and proliferation of some destabilizing phenomena in SEE – terrorism, organized crime, armed factions, illegal trafficking etc. – jeopardize and weakens the process of building democracy and rule of law. At the present moment, SEE states face post-conflict and frozen conflict situations, whereas the hidden interferences of Germany, Austria and Hungary in the Balkans, of Russia in Transnistria and Caucasus, and of Turkey in Cyprus demonstrate that SEE stability and security are still far from reality.

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The Euro-Atlantic accession and integration involved Romania's reconsideration and alignment of national interests according to the principles of the regional interests for the purpose of ensuring collective security. Thus, the Bucharest administration paid special attention to aspect such as: the citizens' fundamental rights and safety, mutual recognition of national identities by bilateral and multilateral relations, economic and social progress by actively participating in reducing discrepancies between the regional economies and between these economies and the western ones, supporting non EU and non NATO countries of SEE in order to assure prosperity and quality of life at European standards. Promoting these interests is only possible by respecting the principles of rule of law, international law, efficient dialogue and cooperation both in SEE and at an international level, within international organizations that have a say in SEE security, stability and progress.

As a component of SEE the access to the Danube River and the Black Sea and due to its position at the confluence of central European, Asian, oriental and Mediterranean zones, Romania enjoys a strategic importance reflected in its regional policies and in accordance with its status of a NATO and EU member illustrated as such:

Firstly, it is clear that Romania belongs to the European NATO and EU integrated area. In this context, we assumed the role of a relevant actor in creating and maintaining the stability of the regional security environment by taking part in actions whose purpose is to extend Europe's security zone. The convergence of EU fundamental security interests with some common historical events have made Romania participate in privileged partnerships with NATO and EU members from the SEE area in fields such as economy, trade, politics, military and collective regional security in particular.

Secondly, guaranteeing SEE stability is one of Romania's security policy. SEE has witnessed breakthroughs in solving various ethnic, religious or territorial conflicts. In geopolitical and military matters, Romania is a catalyst of regional cooperation. The essence of its involvement in SEE is represented by assuring stability and military security as well as in providing support in the reform of the security sector of the former Yugoslavian states. Romania applies the principle of *ownership* both in its own actions and in its regional actions. In this respect, Romania supports the SEE countries' objectives of European integration by advancing political solidarity platforms in order to reach a new level of cooperation and consolidation of EU accession perspectives of this geopolitical area.

Thirdly, the SEE states' stability and democratic progress as well as their capacity to contribute to the regional and EU security is outstandingly relevant to the EU arena. As a NATO and EU member, Romania contributes to building SEE stability by cooperating with its eastern neighbors by means of PSAC and PfP. Also, Romania is interested in supporting NATO-Russia cooperation by monitoring the Russian Federation's constructive contribution to NATO security. Also, Romania is actively engaged in an efficient treaty with Russia signed in 2004. Given the importance that Ukraine and Moldavia have in the NATO area, Romania supports their potential EU and NATO accession intentions, as well as increasing their capacity to fight organized crime and the identification and implementation of a lucrative solution to close the frozen conflict from Transnistria.

Last but not least, Romania wants to apply the positive results of multinational cooperation in the west Balkans, the Black Sea and Caucasus areas, which have a huge development potential insufficiently exploited so far. At the beginning of the 21st century,

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SEE can no longer remain a mere confluence of various geopolitical and geostrategic corridors. Romania's security policy aims at integrating the Black Sea, Caucasus and the Mediterranean Sea into the wider SEE context and generates a unitary perspective of their common risks and opportunities. Romania's geostrategic position is thus relevant to the regional stability, economic and social growth, infrastructure project, guaranteeing energy and communication routes at a transcontinental level, active participation in applying the NATO policies in the field of democracy building and assistance in security implementation endeavors in the spirit of NATO, EU and bilateral partnerships with Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece, and especially in the spirit of developing cooperation with the Russian Federation, which is one of the world's great powers.

The preservation and consolidation of national identity are Romania's vital strategic interests in the wider context of national values of spiritual, cultural and material nature. *"By protecting, promoting and defending them, the essential conditions for the Romanian state and citizens are ensured, according to Constitution. They are the conditions according to which the society's organization and functioning are guaranteed, both by governmental and non-governmental institutions and bodies, and by civil actions... These values are the cohesion factor of local communities and Romanian nation, the catalyst of progress and modernization, the key to a harmonious relationship between individual and national interests, in accordance with the norms of constitutional order. Their accomplishment guarantees respect for national independence and sovereignty, national, unitary and indivisible character of the state, unity based on common language, culture and spiritual life, respect for every citizen's and every community's specific identity."*⁴ The Strategy of National Security and the National Defense Strategy are the two documents that regulate Romania's actions in terms of national interests and collaboration with allied and partner security and defense organizations: the state's national character, sovereignty and independence, unity and indivisibility, the republican form of government, the independence of justice, political pluralism and the official language. These are accompanied by the common interests derived from our country's membership of NATO and EU: human dignity, citizen's rights and freedom, justice, political pluralism and private property.⁵ Thus, Romania's security and prosperity result from all the forms of promotion, consolidation and preservation of the national interests provided that security and prosperity are indispensable elements of the same equation.

4. Conclusions

So, *A strategy for south-eastern Europe?* The answer is definitely YES, which the entire aforementioned argumentation has sustained. The need for a strategy for SEE security must be acknowledged and accepted by all the SEE states and emphasized by the entire Europe. The strategy is based on the entire plethora of national interests as well as collective interests, all of them being in direct accordance with the risks and threats posed by the international security environment and the objectives meant to put these interests in practice. As a result and having in mind the national security policies at all times, it should foster regional security and stability. At the same time, one should permanently consider that collective stability is based on an integrated security system of SEE as a functional

⁴ *** *Strategia de securitate națională a României*, București, 2007, pp.8-9

⁵ *** *Strategia națională de apărare*, București, 2010, Cap. 3, p.8

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element or European and Euro-Atlantic collective security. This is how all the means, general, specific, local, institutional, regional and European regulations are entitled to accomplish, develop and express the fundamental national interests, which is perfectly illustrated by the SEE collective interests.

The strategy expresses intentions and desiderata, actions, stages and events in a strict sequence, which at the same time is flexible and able to make fast reconsiderations and adaptations to the concrete evolutions occurred in the security environment which SEE and Europe experience overall.

Globalization has considerably increased the degree of interdependence at regional level, whereas the ever growing number of risks and threats posed to general security has automatically called for the redefinition and reorientation of national strategies towards collective strategies as a direct consequence of the alliance systems after the end of the Cold War. Next, the national security policies will be put in practice in order to complete the common security and defense policies at the European level. In this context, two aspects are compulsory: being an integral part of the European security building and participating in accomplishing the objectives of the regional security assumed as a result of bilateral and multilateral relationships now and in the future. For this purpose, the objectives of national or international security must reflect the reality of national and international bodies in terms of affirming and redefining national interests within the identification, definition and assertion of national interests in order to ensure that national policies can lead to meeting the regional security objectives in a coherent manner. More precisely, the SEE common security objectives will envisage: harmonizing societies in terms of democracy, constitutional order and rule of law to facilitate collective security, strengthening national economies and economic cooperation in the area, supporting the rapid integration of the SEE in the EU, NATO and OSCE structures, which are the political, economic and military power centers at the global level, strengthening the common defense capabilities, developing civil societies, as well the procedures and mechanisms that ensure the regional sustainable progress, solving the frozen conflicts and avoiding their future occurrence, participating in the international coalition to fight terrorism.

In conclusion, adopting a SEE Strategy and applying it for the purpose of accomplishing these comprehensive objectives will provide the states and the region as a whole with numerous and significant benefits for individual and collective security, will facilitate European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and will allow for a solid and sustainable economic and social growth of SEE.

The new risks and threats posed by the international environment, the complex evolution of the internal and external security environment, as well as the radical change of the security status worldwide require that Romania should find a new approach to its strategic interests and national security objectives. At the same time, the experiences brought by the transnational terrorist attacks accompanied by the natural catastrophes at the global level emphasize the need for a strategy meant to guarantee human life, freedom and independence, as well as goods and activities at the national level.

Romania, as a European country and geographically positioned in the buffer zone of SEE, expresses and promotes its strategic interests from the inside of the influence zone of the European and Euro-Atlantic power centers. As a EU and NATO member and due to its geographical position, Romania is one of the links with the east – Ukraine, Russia,

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central Asia and their interest areas, as well the hot regions such as the Balkans and Middle East. Under these circumstances, the risks and threats posed to Romania's national security are increasing, and so is the dependence to power centers having interests sometimes opposed. Consequently, Romania's strategic interests must be deeply rooted in the national solidarity and regional unity, in harmony with the European and Euro-Atlantic values.

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