

interview

Interview with H.E. Luminița Odobescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs: In foreign policy, predictability and consistency are essential if you wish to be credible and respected

Dear Madam Minister, please tell us, briefly, which are the main priorities of Romania's foreign policy for 2024, considering the international developments?

It will come to no surprise if I say that we shall continue to work within the existing reference framework of Romania's foreign policy. This is based on the three essential pillars: our membership in the EU, NATO, and the Strategic Partnership with the United States.

In foreign policy, predictability and consistency are crucial if you wish to be a credible and respected actor at international level. Nevertheless, we shall endeavour to have a proactive and dynamic approach to this pivotal framework.

Therefore, you will notice a continuity, as we shall act along the same lines, focusing on the enhancement of our national security, on the accession to the Schengen area, which represents a priority at the European level, on the joint actions with our American partners paving the way for Romania's inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program, and on the actions for joining the OECD.

Nonetheless the year 2024 will bring new issues in the spotlight. For instance, the expected continuation of the war in Ukraine raises the subject of maintaining the support for this neighboring state, while also strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank. When it comes to the EU, we shall be actively involved in the discussions regarding the post-2024 Strategic Agenda, the mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework, the conclusion of the negotiations on the twin green and digital transition, in the context of the preparation for the 2024 European elections, a "bridge" between two legislative cycles. Following the historic decisions represented by the acknowledgement of the European perspective for Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, and the granting of candidate status to the first two, we support the political decision regarding the opening of the accession negotiations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. We shall continue to endorse the EU enlargement process and its meritocratic character, as well as for the Western Balkans and our Eastern partners. As part of these efforts, we have created together with France and Germany the Moldova Support Platform.

We shall focus more on the safety of the Romanian citizens who are abroad. The recent events in the Middle East confirm that increased attention and involvement of the Romanian state are required, as well as a better awareness of the risks encountered by Romanian citizens who live or travel in potentially dangerous areas, in order to prevent, as much as possible, negative developments. Unfortunately, the tragic events we are witnessing since October 7 in Israel and in the Gaza Strip, as a result of the terrorist attack perpetrated by Hamas and the hostage taking, have generated a feeling of urgency with regard to the protection of the Romanian citizens.

At this moment, as you well know, there are also Romanian citizens stuck in the Gaza Strip, and our priority is to get them out safe and sound. The Crisis Cell, convened on October 7 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), is currently acting in this direction, on call 24/7. Also, among the... p. 2



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[continued from page 1] people held hostage by Hamas, there are binational citizens (Israeli and Romanian). We are doing our best, at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as at the international level with our partners, to unblock this situation.

We remind you that Romania has most firmly condemned the terrorist attack perpetrated by Hamas and it upholds the right of the State of Israel to defend itself, in line with international law and international humanitarian law. We reiterate the request for the unconditional release of all Israeli hostages. Meanwhile, it is our common duty to do our utmost to protect the lives of innocent civilians and to prevent the regional expansion of the conflict.

Starting from the interdependence between the development and enhancement of Romania's economy, on the one hand, and its membership in the European Union, on the other, which are the foreseeable challenges and opportunities in the context of the potential revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027?

We want a Union that is based on the fundamental European principles and values, on unity, democracy and solidarity. From this perspective, there are some challenges and opportunities of which I shall only mention a few.

Such a Union is internally cohesive. We consider that a fresh impetus is needed in this sense. The revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework offers an opportunity for the reduction of disparities between the EU member states and for a more efficient promotion of the Union's strategic objectives.

These strategic objectives also imply activism in the realm of foreign relations, i.e., in support of Ukraine. Nevertheless, it is important to plead for maintaining the budgetary allocations for the Common Agricultural Policy and the Cohesion Policy. The creation of a special medium-term instrument - a new Ukraine Facility - constitutes an important part of the support provided by the EU according to its political commitment. In this context, it is noteworthy that the invasion of Ukraine has triggered for the EU member states the need to increase their defence investment and the financing for military mobility, which can also be interpreted in terms of cohesion and efficiency.

As regards NATO, important steps have been made towards the consolidation of the collective security. At the NATO Summit in Vilnius, Romania has accomplished all its objectives. Which are the priorities within the North Atlantic Alliance for the following year?

We look ahead to the year 2024, which marks the 20th anniversary of Romania's accession to NATO, fully aware that our country and its citizens enjoy the highest level of security and defence ever achieved in our history.

At the 2024 NATO Summit in Washington, we shall pursue the further enhancement of NATO's defence and deterrence posture on the Eastern Flank, the maintenance of the high profile of the Black Sea on the Alliance's agenda, the NATO support for Ukraine and other partners vulnerable to malign interferences of the Russian Federation, especially in the Republic of Moldova.

It is worthwhile mentioning, in this context, the completion of the U.S. Security Strategy for the Black Sea (the Black Sea Security Act), which reaffirms the strategic importance of this region and whose implementation will make the regional cooperation more substantial.

Do the current events (the war in Ukraine and the crisis in Israel and the Gaza Strip) have a significant impact on Romania's foreign policy objectives in the following period?

The security situation in Ukraine and, implicitly, in Romania's immediate neighborhood, remains serious. Romania will continue to provide support to Ukraine in all forms, as long as it is necessary.

Naturally, we follow with utmost attention the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well. From the first moments of the terrorist attack in Israel, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has tried to ensure the safety of the Romanian citizens in the region. The Crisis Cell, that we have organized, has facilitated the urgent repatriation of almost 1,000 Romanian citizens. We stand in solidarity with the State of Israel, upholding its right to defend itself in line with international humanitarian law provisions and we support the efforts for the unconditional release of hostages and for the protection of all civilians.

We consider that the recent developments in the Middle East require stepping up the efforts of Romania's foreign policy, inclusively within international organizations and multilateral fora, to combat terrorism, extremism of all kinds and antisemitism. We shall integrate this important line of action in our work at the level of the United Nations Organisation, in the exercise of Romania's mandate to the Presidency of the UN Human Rights Council.

It is noteworthy that this security situation shows, once again, the importance of a durable peace in the Middle East, based on the two-state solution.

Just a few weeks ago, Romania has successfully hosted the Three Seas Initiative Summit (3SI) and the 3SI Business Forum. In which domains can we advance the development of the regional resilience?

The 2023 edition of the 3SI Summit and Business Forum confirmed the relevance of this Initiative. We witnessed the first enlargement of this cooperation format, as the Hellenic Republic became its 13th participating state. On the same occasion, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine were granted the status of associated participating states to the 3SI. The 3SI Business Forum had a record attendance, with 1,000 participants from more than 45 countries.

We can expect to see an intensified dialogue with the Hellenic Republic, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, in order to identify some strategic interconnectivity projects on the North-South axis in the region. The cooperation with the 3SI strategic partners (USA, Germany and the European Commission) will be deepened in three fundamental areas: energy, transports, and the digital sector, with a special focus on energy and cyber security. As far as infrastructure is concerned,

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we aim to increase the interconnectivity with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, in order to consolidate the resilience of our neighboring partner countries and to anchor them in the EU.

In the last years, we have observed a major increase of the disinformation phenomenon and of the faulty information disseminated online. Could you mention some of the measures that might contribute to countering them?

Disinformation, especially from external sources attempting to destabilize and interfere is a vast subject. I shall limit myself to pointing out just a few ideas, starting from the assumption that in order to be resilient it is essential to enhance, on the one hand, our attachment to a value system, and on the other hand the efficiency of the democratic institutions. Some foreign actors, i.e., the Russian Federation, are interested in destabilizing the democratic mechanisms both in the Euro-Atlantic area and at global level. The new developments in the Middle East demonstrate how terrorism, extremism and antisemitism are amplified by propaganda and disinformation. Aside from its efforts at national level, Romania actively contributes to the actions of the European Union and of NATO to combat disinformation.

At the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the subjects that fall under our area of competence, we correct fake news from the public sphere (whichever are the sources that have generated them), by means of a transparent communication, based on facts, so that Romanian citizens may be accurately informed.

We are aware of the necessity for a permanent cooperation with the civil society and mass-media, with whom we foster dialogue, so as to ensure an adequate response to these phenomena at the level of the entire society.

Biography

A career diplomat, **Luminița-Teodora Odobescu** is the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs since 15 June 2023. Between November 2021 and June 2023, she was Presidential Adviser, acting as Adviser for European Affairs to the President of Romania, while also coordinating the Foreign Policy Department. From September 2015 to November 2021, she was the Permanent Representative of Romania to the European Union, successfully managing, in this capacity, the first Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU (the first semester of 2019). In December 2014, she was granted the diplomatic rank of Ambassador. Between February and November 2012, she was State Secretary on European Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from June 2008 to February 2012 she was Director General of the European Union Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the period 2002-2007, she held various positions in the Permanent Representation of Romania to the European Union in Brussels.

Translated by
Caroline-Raluca Ghețu
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opinion

The Three Seas Initiative. Lithuania's Perspective on the Regional Cooperation

The Three Seas Initiative was welcomed in Lithuania with some reluctance. The first outlook from the Republic of Lithuania connected it with alternatives to Brussels and the European Union, which would be against the European politics of our country. The EU, as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is the background of our security and economic stability. We don't have to forget that Euro-optimism is still very high in Lithuania.

It is necessary to emphasize that all security-related challenges of Lithuania are strongly connected with Russia. We have regularly joked, during the last ten years, that Lithuanian political scientists are discussing and analyzing - Russia, Russia, and once again Russia. Let's remember here the words of Golda Meir, famous former Prime Minister of Israel, that 'you can't discuss with those who came to kill you'.

So, Lithuania sees the *Three Seas Initiative* through these lenses. We know that this *Initiative* is focusing mainly on the areas of transport and energy, but we understand also the major influence of this project for the stability and economic development of our region and all the East-Central Europe. Also, we must not forget that this small country is trying to use every possibility to join a coalition or a group of countries. It's clear that the *Three Seas Initiative* is important for Lithuania, in parallel with other platforms - *Bucharest Nine*, *Nordic-Baltic Eight* (NB8), the *Council of the Baltic Sea States* and the *Lublin Triangle*.

The Republic of Lithuania would like to finish important projects of transport - *Via Baltica* (the Warsaw-Kaunas-Riga-Tallinn motorway), also *Rail Baltica* (Warsaw-Kaunas-Riga-Tallinn-Helsinki). Also, we want to share our experiment with energy diversification, for example the development of the LNG terminal in Klaipeda, and the cut-off of our dependency on Russian energy resources. We are working toward suspending all electric connections with Russia. New electric lines were created with Poland and Sweden. The last one was built on the bottom of the Baltic Sea.

All these tasks were not and still are not easy, especially when you have Kaliningrad District on one side and Belarus on the other side. *The Three Seas Initiative* can be really helpful in these projects.



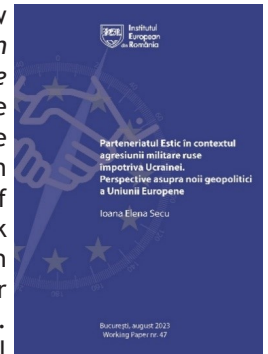
Andrzej Puksztó

Andrzej Pukszto, PhD, has worked at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas since 2005, as an associate professor and Head of the Department of Political Science (2008-2020). His research and lectures relate to areas of the East and Central European politics, European Union politics, the relations between the EU and Russia. He is also editor in chief of the *Baltic Journal of Law and Politics*. As a visiting lecturer, he taught in many universities - “Reichman” University in Herzliya, the Catholic University of Vendée, the University of the Basque Country in Bilbao, the University of Sarajevo, “Georgia Gwinnett College” in Atlanta.

publications

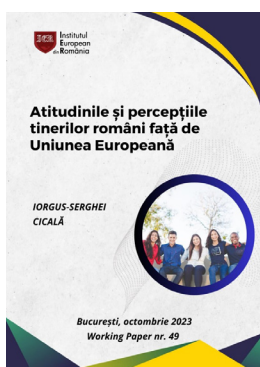
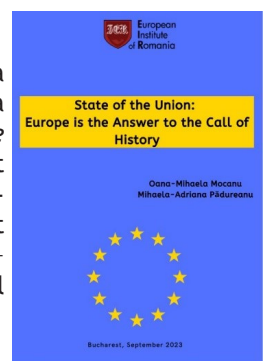
New publications launched by EIR

In the period August-October 2023, the European Institute of Romania published a series of new papers within the collection of microstudies. The first is a working paper entitled “*The Eastern Partnership in the context of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. Perspectives on the new geopolitics of the European Union*”. The paper is written by **Ioana Elena Secu**, expert in the European Studies Unit, EIR, and presents to those interested, the effects of the war in Ukraine on the evolution and the possibility of further consolidation of the Eastern Partnership. Fourteen years have passed since the launch of the Eastern Partnership, which is a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Thus, given that during this period significant changes took place in the region - mainly as a result of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, which, along with the Republic of Moldova, received the status of candidate state for the EU accession - the author is investigating the possibility of developing a new European strategy on the Eastern Partnership. The sources used for this study are: official documents, speeches by political personalities, as well as studies and scientific articles. In the last section of the paper is presented the particularity of the European Union, as an entity which supports the democratic transformation of the member states and, also, of the partner countries. The paper can be accessed [here](#), in Romanian.



The second working paper published in the microstudies collection deals with the evaluation of the European Political Community using a SWOT analysis. In the framework of the paper entitled “*European Political Community: Opportunities and Challenges*”, the author **Caroline-Raluca Ghețu**, expert in the European Studies Unit, the EIR, sought to identify the elements that make the European Political Community a particular cooperation format, which does not aim to duplicate other regional mechanisms, but fosters interactions between the participating countries in order to solve the common challenges. Different points of view are presented that support or criticise this initiative, and depict the results of the first two Summits of this format. The author stresses that the flexibility of this inter-governmental forum encourages cooperation without imposing constraints. The originality note of this paper is given by the presentation of a SWOT analysis applied to the initiative of the European Political Community. The paper, available in Romanian, can be accessed [here](#).

As we have accustomed our readers, the delivery by the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, of her fourth State of the European Union speech, on 13 September 2023, was a topic for the publication of a paper in the *Opinions* section. The document, entitled “*State of the European Union 2023. Europe is the answer to the call of history*”, produced in bilingual format (Romanian-English), is signed by **Oana-Mihaela Mocanu**, Director General of EIR, and **Mihaela-Adriana Pădureanu**, Expert in the European Studies Unit, EIR, and presents the most significant elements of the #SOTEU2023 speech: the political dimension, climate change and economy - as interconnected areas, social, digital and artificial intelligence development, i.e. external relations, security, and migration. The paper can be accessed [here](#).



In October was published a new working paper entitled: “*Attitudes and perceptions of young Romanians regarding the European Union*”, written by **Iorgus-Serghei Cicală**. He completed an internship within the European Studies Unit, EIR, during which he conducted research on the attitude of young Romanians towards the European Union. Following the implementation of this project, it emerged that young Romanians (18-25 years old) have a pronounced Euro-enthusiastic feeling, 60% of the respondents considering that Romania had rather benefited from its EU membership. The paper, available in Romanian, can be accessed [here](#).

Mihaela-Adriana Pădureanu
European Studies Unit

Project AFTIPA - Anti-Fraud Training Initiative for Public Administration.

Recent developments

The European Institute of Romania continues the implementation of the *AFTIPA - Anti-Fraud Training Initiative for Public Administration*, financed by the European Commission through the EUAF - 2022 - TRAI funding line.

The project aims to train at least 675 professionals working in public procurement departments, in the control bodies within the ministries and in other institutions of the public administration, both at central and local levels, as well as other staff categories responsible for attracting and using the European grants.

The training programme comprises a series of three courses: *Preventing and combating corruption*, *Public Procurement*, *Whistleblowing in Public Institutions*, which will be delivered both in the form of classroom trainings and in e-learning format.

The classroom trainings, held in Bucharest and aimed at professionals activating in the central public administration, started on September 25 with a first session of the Public Procurement course. According to the activity schedule, they will continue until June 2024.

The e-learning courses, intended mainly for the local public administration staff, will be available until August 2024 on a dynamic learning platform, thus giving learners the opportunity to complete them at their own pace, asynchronously. In order to enrol in the e-learning courses, they must fulfil the following conditions of admission: to work in an institution of the central or local public administration and to create an account on www.aftipa.ro.

For more details about the project or the enrolment process, please contact the project team at the e-mail address cursuri.aftipa@ier.gov.ro or by phone: 0724 318 506.

Florentina Costache
Communication expert, AFTIPA

A new project implemented by the EIR

From 1 August 2023 to 1 April 2024, the European Institute of Romania (EIR) is implementing a **Grant Agreement signed with the [Council of Europe](#)**.

The Council of Europe is implementing the TJENI project (“Foster transparency of judicial decisions and enhancing the national implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)”) funded by [the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation](#). The TJENI project aims to improve the transparency and consistency of national judicial decisions and to foster exchanges on the most up-to-date information on human rights issues. The accessibility of case law in local languages is a key issue in the effort to better identify human rights issues at the national level.

In order to facilitate access to the ECHR case law at the national level, a **Memorandum of Agreement on the development of a Romanian HUDOC user interface** was concluded with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in March 2023, and the EIR started the translation of the HUDOC interface as defined in the Memorandum. The TJENI project will continue to support this process through the grant, thus facilitating the translation of the HUDOC interface and the relevant case law of the ECtHR into Romanian.

By translating the relevant ECHR case law and the HUDOC interface into Romanian, the EIR is contributing to the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec (2021)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on the publication and dissemination of the European Convention on Human Rights, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and other relevant texts.

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