




Weekly Briefing

**Romania external relations briefing:
Regional meetings for addressing current problems
Oana Cristina Popovici**

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin
Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.
 +36 1 5858 690
 office@china-cee.eu
 china-cee.eu

Regional meetings for addressing current problems

Faced Several meetings of the leaders of the countries in the region took place during the month of June, with the aim of discussing security issues and deciding on the new NATO Strategic Concept. In terms of supporting Ukraine and contributing to the strengthening of the Allied presence on the Eastern Flank, Romania made its position known during the Bucharest 9 summit. The Three Seas Initiative summit was focused on interconnection projects among the countries in the region, Romania assuming to enhance the activity of this format of cooperation and make it more visible at European level.

European Union (EU) countries in the Central and Eastern Europe have already established a tradition in reuniting under the umbrella of several regional formats of cooperation for discussing the most pressing issues on the agenda and determining a common position and way of action regarding current problems.

One of the first meetings of this kind during June was the Bucharest 9 (B9) format, an initiative launched by the Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, in which NATO member states on the Eastern Flank of the Alliance participate. The first B9 Summit was held in Bucharest in November 2015ⁱ, this format of cooperation evolving into a platform for the coordination and consultation of allies on the Eastern Flank, but also at the transatlantic level, giving participants the possibility of designing common positions on different topics. In the actual context, since the beginning of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine at the end of February, the Central and Eastern European allies which were part of the B9 format have maintained a close dialogue and coordination, according to the Romanian President Klaus Iohannisⁱⁱ. This year, the gathering of the nine presidents was intended to prepare the NATO Summit in Madrid. The leaders' reunion started by recognizing the deterioration of the security environment, caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the worst threat in decades to the Euro-Atlantic securityⁱⁱⁱ. They have signed a common declaration in which they strongly condemned "Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine, which benefited from Belarus' complicity and used the Black Sea as a launching pad"³. A common declaration was adopted with this occasion.

The topic of NATO occupied an important place in the discussions, President Iohannis considering that "there was a substantial exchange of views between the participating leaders

on recent security developments”². The leaders were focused on preparing the decisions at the NATO Summit in Madrid. In this view, Romania considered that the new NATO Strategic Concept should focus on “giving priority to collective defence, defining Russia as a threat to NATO and strengthening the Alliance at all levels, in order to meet all present and future challenges”². President Iohannis supports the prospect of strengthening NATO relations with partners in the region, who are deeply exposed to Russian pressure and aggression. In addition, Romania strongly endorses the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO and the continuation of the open door policy. The accession of these states will contribute to strengthening the security of the Alliance as a whole, for a more effective position of deterrence and defense, including on the Eastern Flank. In the acceptance of the President, the Eastern Flank is at the moment the most exposed to Russia’s threats, therefore a consolidated NATO presence here, and especially at the Black Sea, is needed: „The Black Sea region is of strategic importance for Euro-Atlantic security, and future deterrence and defense measures must prioritize the security needs of the area”, according to the President².

The process of adapting the Alliance to the future must begin with a deep rethinking of NATO’s position of deterrence and defence in the long run, in order to ensure that NATO is able and prepared to respond effectively and calibrated to the threats it faces². The reunion was accompanied by the assurance, sent by the US President Joe Biden, that “the United States is committed to defending NATO’s Eastern Flank, strengthening the region’s energy security and working together to support Ukraine”¹.

The discussions of the summit were also dominated by the need to continue to support both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova given the actual situation, but also in the view of ensuring food security and strengthening NATO’s relations with partners in the region. Thus, not only the economic, but also the humanitarian perspectives were tackled, as part of the multiple consequences generated by the wariv.

Some similar subjects were also among the major topics of discussions during the French President Emmanuel Macron visit in Romania in mid-Junev. The two countries recognized that, against the background of the crisis generated by the military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, the cooperation on the security line was intensified under the NATO background. Another topic of common priority interest for Romania and France was to ensure global food security, deeply affected by the blockade imposed by Russia on Ukrainian ports, which prevents the distribution of cereals in various regions of the world. A special topic addressed during the visit was related to the support that Romania and France provide to the Republic of Moldova. The two countries and Germany launched in April an important initiative

for this purpose, known as the Support Platform for the Republic of Moldova. The two heads of state discussed on the preparations for the follow-up conference on this topic that Romania will host during this summer.

During the same month, Romania was present at the seventh edition of the Summit of the Three Seas Initiative, which took place in Latvia. President Klaus Iohannis stated that the summit discussed how the Initiative should position itself in the current European security context, clearly establishing the contribution it can make by implementing strategic interconnection projects in the three core areas (transport, energy, and the digital field). While focusing on meeting its basic objectives, the Initiative should also be prepared to adapt its responses on a multidimensional level^{vi}. In this direction, following the recent Davos Economic Forum, an agreement was signed between the Romanian company Transgaz and the Investment Fund of the Initiative, which aims to develop natural gas infrastructure and connectivity, with the integration of hydrogen transport. The value of the projects is estimated at EUR 626 million. Two other projects developed under this format of cooperation, of high interest for Romania, are the Rail2Sea and Via Carpathia initiatives. Their implementation will improve the interconnection between the countries in the region, ensuring military mobility and infrastructure resilience, which are essential in the current geopolitical context.

Romania will host the future Summit and the Business Forum of the Initiative in 2023 and announced that its intentions are, by then, to analyse all the possibilities through which the Initiative can help Ukraine. In particular, the focus will be on interconnection projects in which Ukraine could participate, as a partner of the Initiative. In addition, President Iohannis specified that during Romania's new mandate to lead the Initiative, the activities carried out will be in full coordination with the strategic agenda of the EU, as well as in the direction of strengthening the transatlantic partnership. Efforts will also be deployed for attracting international financial organizations and for involving the international private sector in order to achieve the goals of the Initiative. In the next year, intentions are to develop dialogue with the United Kingdom and Japan to identify concrete possibilities for cooperation. All these actions are intended to reducing development gaps and strengthening resilience in the Three Seas region, "for the benefit of the prosperity of our citizens, including in concrete response to today's challenges on our borders"^{vii}.

Under the current formula, there are 12 EU countries which cooperate with the aim of coordinating investments on the north-south axis in areas such as energy, transport, digitization, and attracting additional funds in these sectors. However, although the growth potential in the region is high, according to experts^{viii}, there are some major challenges. The main problem

remains the lack of capital. Experts also consider that the importance of this part of the EU will increase both economically and politically, only if the countries in the region are ready to show determination in applying the discussed project and to mobilize funds in the intended sectors. Another highlighted problem is the lack of a stabilized decision-making structure, which should be in charge with the large investments projects aimed to be enhanced. Finally, more transparency is required, among which the inclusion of the representatives of civil society in the decision-making bodies of the Three Seas Initiative.

All these formats of cooperation show a growing interest in the region, especially on the background of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and tensions along the EU's eastern borders. The major topic on the discussion list is concerned to increasing security, but following a good collaboration in this area, other fruitful economic projects might emerge.

ⁱ <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2022/06/10/summit-b9-presedintele-biden-catre-liderii-nato-reuniti-la-bucuresti-sua-se-angajeaza-sa-apere-flancul-estic--932828> accessed June 25

ⁱⁱ <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2022/06/10/video-klaus-iohannis-schimb-de-opinii-de-substanta-in-cadrul-summitului-b9-apararea-colectiva-sarcina-fundamentala-a-nato--932941> accessed June 25

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2022/06/10/video-summit-b9-declaratie-comuna-solicitam-rusiei-retragerea-de-pe-teritoriul-ucrainei-trebuie-sa-crestem-prezenta-aliata-multidimensionala--933023> accessed June 25

^{iv} <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2022/06/10/video-summit-b9-iohannis-un-accent-deosebit-a-fost-pus-pe-nevoia-de-a-sprrijini-in-continuare-ucraina-asigurarea-securitatii-alimentare--932955> accessed June 25

^v <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/declaratii-de-presa/declaratii-de-presa-comune-ale-presedintelui-romaniei-klaus-iohannis-cu-presedintele-republicii-franceze-emmanuel-macron> accessed July 8

^{vi} <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/klaus-iohannis-participa-alaturi-de-liderii-altor-11-tari-la-summitul-initiativei-celor-trei-mari-1982289>, accessed June 30

^{vii} <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/declaratii-de-presa/declaratii-de-presa-comune-ale-presedintelui-romaniei-klaus-iohannis-cu-presedintele-republicii-letonia-egils-levits-si-presedintele-republicii-polone-andrzej-duda> accessed June 30

^{viii} <https://pressone.ro/initiativa-celor-trei-mari-ce-i-lipseste-pentru-a-deveni-o-reusita> accessed July 5