



Weekly Briefing

**Romania external relations briefing:
Some Perspectives on 75 Years of
Romanian-Chinese Relations in 2024**

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Some Perspectives on 75 Years of Romanian-Chinese Relations in 2024

Introduction

In 2024, Romania and China celebrate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations, signifying a noteworthy achievement in their bilateral relations. Throughout the years (1949-2024), the connection between the two countries has developed through many historical, social, and economic stages, influenced by a variety of factors, including geopolitical and economic factors as well as cultural interactions. This briefing explores several perspectives as well as reflections on the relations between Romania and China in 2024, considering the historical background, current opportunities and perspectives in the context of bilateral and multilateral relations, and the possible future direction of Romanian-Chinese cooperation.

Historical Background

The relations between Romania and China were officially established on 5 October 1949, shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Romania is thus the third country in the world to recognize the newly-established People's Republic¹. Beyond doubt, "relations between Romania and China, beyond the historiographic complexities of the 20th century, are the result of [various other] contacts [that are] much more rooted in the history of international relations, especially when attention is directed to the history of other relations of China with peoples in Central and Eastern Europe"². In this regard, it is notable to point out the fact that Romanian-Chinese relations, historically debating, present "a certain connection between elements that previously functioned independently. The historical conglomerate of Romanian-Chinese relations is not necessarily a novelty in the Romanian specialized literature, nor in Chinese [specialized] literature, especially when direct references are made to the scientific efforts undertaken, for example, by Ambassador [Romulus Ioan] Budura himself in the diplomatic archives of the [Romanian] Ministry of Foreign Affairs"³. Nevertheless, the nature of Romanian-Chinese relations has experienced fluctuations throughout the years, and

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, *Relații bilaterale: Republica Populară Chineză*, December 2021, <https://mae.ro/bilateral-relations/3121#759>, accessed 06 February 2024. For further reference, also see Radu Sava, *Reflecții asupra relațiilor româno-chineze la 70 de ani de raporturi diplomatice: Convorbiri cu Excelența Sa Ambasadorul Romulus Ioan Budura* [Reflections on Romanian-Chinese relations at 70 years of diplomatic rapport: Conversations with His Excellency Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura], Sibiu: Lucian Blaga University Press, 2020, p. 25.

² Radu Sava, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³ *Ibidem*.

probably the most comprehensive approach to studying and discussing the historical development of bilateral relations is evidently through a *conceptual staging* of diplomatic relations, especially but also of relations between Romania and China, starting with the year 1880.

In brief, the *conceptual staging* of Romanian-Chinese relations could comprise several different periods, before and after 5 October 1949, which include the initial contacts in the second half of the 19th century between the Guangxu Emperor and King Carol I of Romania, through Marquis Zeng Jize and Mihail Kogălniceanu⁴. Subsequently, Romanian-Chinese relations could acquire a conceptual dimension from this perspective of *staging* (as in the sense of stage, level, or period within structure) or *phasing* of bilateral contacts, as follows⁵:

- The *interbellum* or the interwar period;
- The *Golden Age/Golden Decades*, or the postbellum, post-war period;
- The Late Modern/Postmodern period.

In light of this, it is important to acknowledge the fact that during the post-war period, Romania as well as China intended to pursue an independent foreign policy in relation to the Soviet Union. Therefore, despite the fact that bilateral relations between Romania and China have fluctuated over the years as a result of changes in domestic and international politics, a common goal has shaped the pursuit. In the course of time, this objective has led to an increase in economic cooperation and a thriving of cultural contacts, which established the basis for a diverse and comprehensive relation that will last well into 2024. For example, Romania and China uphold regular and frequent interactions at the highest possible level⁶, determining a robust and collaborative approach to advancing practical cooperation in key areas, formulated on the 2013 *Joint Declaration by the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Romania on Deepening Bilateral Cooperation in the New Circumstances*⁷.

⁴ See Radu Sava, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-15.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 15-43.

⁶ See, for example, *Joint statement highlights exemplary relations* in Xinhua, 27 November 2013, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013livisiteuasias/2013-11/27/content_17133446.htm, accessed 06 February 2024.

⁷ See the Government of Romania, *Declarația comună a Guvernului României și Guvernului Republicii Populare Chineze privind aprofundarea cooperării bilaterale în noile circumstanțe* [Joint Declaration by the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Romania on Deepening Bilateral Cooperation in the New Circumstances], 25 November 2013, <https://gov.ro/ro/stiri/declaratia-comuna-a-guvernului-romaniei-si-guvernului-republicii-populare-chineze-privind-aprofundarea-cooperarii-bilaterale-in-noile-circumstante>, accessed 06 February 2024; Gao Ge, "The Development of Sino-Romanian Relations After 1989" in *Global Economic Observer*, vol. 5, nr. 1, 2017, p. 131.

Opportunities and Perspectives

In 2024, bilateral relations between Romania and China could bring about several important opportunities and perspectives at both bilateral and multilateral levels. Taking into account the fact that China is Romania's largest and primary commercial partner in Asia and beyond the European Union (EU), as well as the fact that in March 2024 Romania will (although partially) join the Schengen Area – with border checks ceasing to exist for air-based and sea/maritime-based transportation⁸ – trade between the two countries is expected to continue to grow. Furthermore, economic growth in Romania has been “one of the highest in the EU since 2010”⁹, and “in 2024, the economy is projected to recover, with growth close to 3 percent, as consumption – driven by rising real wages – and external demand are strengthening”¹⁰. Subsequently, it is equally important to note that, according to official data, the total value of commerce between Romania and China in 2020 amounted to USD 6.687 billion, with Romanian exports valued at 942.92 million USD, while imports amounted to 5.744 billion USD, with China having a trade surplus of \$4.8 billion¹¹. According to Romanian statistics, “the bilateral trade value with China in the first nine months of 2021 amounted to USD 6,246.15 million, which represents a 29.36% increase compared to 2020. Out of this total, Romanian exports accounted for USD 935.04 million, reflecting a 40.40% growth, while imports from China reached USD 5,311.10 million, showing a 27.60% rise. The trade deficit with Romania amounted to USD 4.8 billion in 2020”¹².

Simultaneously, as per the Romanian National Trade Registry Office, Romania had a total of 13,153 enterprises with Chinese investment as of December 2021, with the combined subscribed capital of these companies amounting to USD 403.057 million. Therefore, China is ranked 20th among countries in terms of the domicile of investors in enterprises with foreign participation in the Romanian social capital market. Based on the FDI Report (Foreign Direct Investments) 2020 by the National Bank of Romania, Chinese investors rank 20th among

⁸ For further reference, see The European Commission, *Bulgaria and Romania to join Schengen area starting with air and sea borders: Commission welcomes landmark Council decision*, 30 December 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6861, accessed 06 February 2024.

⁹ See The World Bank in Romania, 09 October 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/romania/overview#:~:text=Romania%20aims%20to%20accelerate%20structural,economic%20activity%20in%20the%20EU.>, accessed 06 February 2024.

¹⁰ International Monetary Fund, *IMF Staff Concludes Visit to Romania*, 01 February 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/02/01/pr2432-romania-imf-staff-concludes-visit#:~:text=In%202024%2C%20the%20economy%20is,and%20external%20demand%20are%20strengthening>., accessed 06 February 2024.

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, *Relații bilaterale: Republica Populară Chineză*, December 2021.

¹² *Ibidem*.

foreign investors, with a balance of 1,110 million euros and a weight of 1.2% of total FDI¹³. These investments being held either directly or through companies in intermediary countries¹⁴.

In addition to this, regular and frequent interactions at the highest possible level have continued to remain an important part of Romanian-Chinese cooperation (to mention a few): Meetings between President Klaus Iohannis and President Xi Jinping (New York, 2015)¹⁵; President Klaus Iohannis, and Special Envoy of the President of the People's Republic of China, Guo Shengkun (Bucharest, 2018)¹⁶; Romanian Foreign Minister Teodor Meleşcanu and Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Wang Chao (Bucharest, 2018)¹⁷; Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă, and Premier Li Keqiang (Dubrovnik, 2019)¹⁸; Visits by Ambassador Jiang Yu, Special Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for China-CEEC Cooperation (Bucharest, 2022 and 2023)¹⁹; Meeting of Romanian Foreign Minister Luminița Odobescu and the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Romania, H.E. Han Chunlin (Bucharest, 30 January 2024)²⁰.

Furthermore, Romania, on the one hand, may capitalize on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to improve connectivity between Europe and Asia and gain access to the Chinese market, while China, on the other hand, may avail itself of the opportunities presented by the European Common Market through Romania as a member state of the European Union (EU) and soon-to-be(come) member of the Schengen Air and Schengen Sea areas. To put this differently, the economic ties between Romania and China have experienced substantial

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ For further reference, see the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Xi Jinping Meets with President Klaus Iohannis of Romania*, 27 September 2019, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/topics_665678/2015zt/xjpdmgjxgsfwbcxlhgcl70znlfh/201509/t20150930_705371.html, accessed 06 February 2024.

¹⁶ For further reference, see the Romanian Presidential Administration, *President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, received Special Envoy of the President of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Guo Shengkun*, 27 April 2018, <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/president-of-romania-mr-klaus-iohannis-received-special-envoy-of-president-of-the-people-s-republic-of-china-mr-guo-shengkun>, accessed 06 February 2024.

¹⁷ For further reference, see *MAE: Meleşcanu și ministrul adjunct al Afacerilor Externe chinez au discutat despre Parteneriatul strategic UE-China* [MFA: Meleşcanu and the Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs discussed the EU-China Strategic Partnership] in *Agerpres*, 03 December 2018, <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2018/12/03/mae-melescanu-si-ministrul-adjunct-al-afacerilor-externe-chinez-au-discutat-despre-parteneriatul-strategic-ue-china--221367>, accessed 06 February 2024.

¹⁸ For further reference, see the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Li Keqiang Meets with Prime Minister Viorica Dancila of Romania*, 13 April 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/3265_665445/3215_664730/3217_664734/201904/t20190416_578750.html, accessed 06 February 2024.

¹⁹ For example, see the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Special Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for China-CEEC Cooperation Affairs Jiang Yu Visits Romania, Serbia and North Macedonia*, 24 November 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjtb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/xwlb_664406/202311/t20231124_11186934.html, accessed 06 February 2024.

²⁰ For further reference, see the Embassy of the People's Republic of China to Romania, *Han Chunlin Dashi baihui Luo waijiao bazhang Aduobeisiku* [Ambassador Han Chunlin met with Romanian Foreign Minister Odobescu], 31 January 2024, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/242hi_YpcX6oO5CIGELPtw, accessed 06 February 2024.

expansion in recent years, propelled by the exchange of goods and capital. In addition to this, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to weaknesses in worldwide supply chains, leading both nations to reconsider their economic approaches and explore possibilities for expanding and strengthening their *co-operations* at both bilateral and multilateral levels.

One key aspect of this *co-operations* could be represented by innovation and technology cooperation, given the fact that these offer a promising opportunity for collaboration between Romania and China in 2024. Both nations have achieved notable progress in artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and digital infrastructure, for instance. By utilizing their specific expertise and specialized knowledge, Romania and China could accelerate technological advancement and tackle common challenges, such as climate change and sustainable development.

In terms of cultural and educational contacts between Romania and China, several significant developments have taken shape as a result of Premier Li Keqiang's official visit to Romania in 2013. In another train of thought, on 25 November 2013, the Government of Romania and the Government of the People's Republic of China signed an Agreement on establishing and authorizing the operation of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Beijing and the Chinese Cultural Center in Bucharest²¹. The inauguration of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Beijing took place on 14 July 2015, maintaining the promotion of Romanian culture in the Chinese Capital, while the Chinese Cultural Center has become active since its establishment²², in maintaining the promotion of Chinese culture in Bucharest. Moreover, Chinese language and literature lectureships are available at the Universities of Bucharest, Iași, and Cluj-Napoca, with four Romanian language lectureships or sections at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, the Beijing International Studies University, the Xi'an International Studies University, and Tianjin Foreign Studies University²³. Also, the Transilvania University of Brașov established a Chinese Language Department in 2015, and further cooperation agreements between Romanian and Chinese universities have expanded over the subsequent years – with an obvious tendency to increase the level of inter-university cooperation in 2024, especially in light of the 75th anniversary of Romanian-Chinese relations.

Romania has four Confucius Institutes located at the Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu, the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, the Transilvania University of Brașov, and the University of Bucharest. Additionally, there are ten Confucius classes across Romania (Deva,

²¹ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, *Relații bilaterale: Republica Populară Chineză*, December 2021.

²² See, for example, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Romania, *Să lăsăm prietenia chino-română să navigheze!*, 04 December 2017, http://ro.china-embassy.gov.cn/rom/sgzcnew/sghdnew/201712/t20171206_2988838.html, accessed 06 February 2024.

²³ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, *Relații bilaterale: Republica Populară Chineză*, December 2021.

Constanța, for example), which are overseen by the assigned Romania-based Confucius Institutes, and a network of over 130 Chinese language teaching centers as of 2018²⁴. Besides, in 2018, East China University of Science and Technology (Shanghai) and Lucian Blaga University (Sibiu) signed agreements to launch the first MBA program in Applied Global Economy, a 2-year program taught in English²⁵. In a similar way, Transilvania University in Brașov introduced the first Master's program in Traditional Chinese Medicine in Central and Eastern Europe²⁶. Other sustained examples in terms of cultural and educational contacts between Romania and China are the establishment of the ECUST (Sibiu Sino-European International Business School), the first Romanian-Chinese Business School, as a result of an agreement between the East China University of Science and Technology and Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu, as well as the Bucharest-based China-Romania Science and Technology Park, representing “a fruitful outcome” of the effective collaboration between the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in Bucharest and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Beijing²⁷.

All these accomplishments are also essential for fostering mutual understanding and strengthening interpersonal connections between Romania and China. Academic institutions, research centers, and cultural or educational groups from both countries have the opportunity to cooperate on a variety of initiatives, academic exchanges, and research ventures in different fields. Through the promotion of language acquisition, for example, cultural consciousness, and academic collaboration, to name a few, young generations of Romanian and Chinese individuals have the ability and the institutionalized means to cultivate the forthcoming cohort of leaders and foster cohesion across cultural boundaries. After all, this facilitation of cultural exchanges, educational cooperation, and interpersonal connections can cultivate a shared comprehension and enhance long-term bilateral Romanian-Chinese relations, fostering mutual respect, trust, and prosperity for both nations.

Instead of a conclusion?

The Romanian-Chinese bilateral relations in 2024 could exhibit a complex interplay between historical events, financial considerations, and distinct geopolitical circumstances in both nations, as well as in nearby regions according to the existing international framework.

²⁴ For further reference, see Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Romania, *Ambasada Chinei în România a fost gazda celei de-a doua ceremonii de acordare „Bursei ambasadorului chinez” și recepția cadrelor didactice și studenților din România în anul 2018*, 19 May 2018, http://ro.china-embassy.gov.cn/rom/sgzcnew/sghdnew/201805/t20180519_2988948.html, accessed 06 February 2024.

²⁵ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, *Relații bilaterale: Republica Populară Chineză*, December 2021.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

Despite significant transformations in the bilateral relations over the past 75 years, various opportunities and perspectives continue to persist across a number of areas. Enhancing bilateral relations and addressing shared challenges can be achieved through economic cooperation, technical progress, cultural exchange, and other significant forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. In order to develop a robust and beneficial partnership in the future, Romania and China should prioritize the cultivation of mutual comprehension, confidence, and collaboration as they navigate the complexities of the contemporary global environment.

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