

Ionel Nicu Sava: Rumania's Foreign Policy and Its Contribution towards the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy

After the downfall of communism, Rumania's foreign policy aimed at two things – the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic security system and its accession to the European Union. It took the country 13 years to become a member of NATO and 16 to accede to the EU. For Rumania, the path from isolation to integration was longer than for other east European countries, doubtless an extraordinary accomplishment.

At a time when a new generation of diplomats evolved, Rumania played an active role in managing the crises in former Yugoslavia, Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq as well as in the search for solutions to global questions such as terrorism, climate change, and poverty alleviation. However, the laurels for these achievements have already been awarded, and as a member of the EU, Rumania must now tackle the question of internal reforms in its diplomacy, which in large parts is still characterised by incoherence, nepotism, and corruption.

Rumania definitely has the option of introducing its own foreign-policy agenda into that of Europe. However, it is confronted by the West's demand that Bucharest should increase its engagement in the development of an integrated foreign and security policy. It now is for Rumania's foreign policy to mature and to become professional. Today, this policy is determined by the country's attitude towards NATO and the EU. Both organisations demand that its members pursue an open and active policy, which includes forming small alliances with other members and developing joint projects between the candidate states as well as launching initiatives for an eastern enlargement of the NATO security area, implementing an active neighbourhood policy at the eastern border of the EU, and integrating Russia into Europe's foreign and security policy.

Rumania can do a great deal: It is engaged in redefining transatlantic relations, in establishing a common attitude towards Russia, in stabilising the western Balkan region, which includes the Kosovo question, in transforming the Black Sea region into an area of peace and economic cooperation, in drafting a common EU energy strategy, in promoting the EU accession applications of Moldavia, Ukraine, and Turkey, in supporting the endeavours for stabilisation in Africa, and in helping the EU to assume a global role.

The debate about the relations between the EU and the USA which began a few years ago is not over yet. Whereas those who support a foreign and security policy with a European identity believe that a US military presence in Europe is no longer necessary, the USA thinks that the Europeans already have enough scope for initiative. The truth probably lies in between these two positions.

Under the pressure of events, Washington tends to act unilaterally. In this, it resembles a lone fireman who tries to put out a fire that has not even started. The east European countries have been involved in managing the crises in Iraq and Afghanistan right from the beginning, with countries such as Rumania and Poland being caught between the demands of the Americans and Europe's criticism. The explanation for this might be the singularity of the Euro-Atlantic integration of these countries, whose foreign and security policy started to go through a process of 'Americanisation' after 1990. The fact that the foreign policy of these countries is now subordinate to American interests could be the price they are paying.

The Rumanians will very likely have a problem not with the American influence but with the Europeans' efforts to establish a balance, with the one understood as complement of the other.

There are lessons to be learnt from the Iraq mission: Pursuing a one-sided intervention while depending on only one centre of power could disturb the equilibrium of the foreign and security policy of the smaller East European countries and/or lead to its subjugation. The conditions for redefining future relations with the USA have by now been created in all European countries. Independently of the outcome of the US elections scheduled for 2008, these relations must be rearranged in some details – the first country to move in this direction was Germany under Chancellor Merkel.

The viability of a common foreign and security policy marked by a relaxed relationship with the USA will show itself especially in contacts with Russia. All important European countries have logged some kind of failure in their relations with Russia which strained their respective bilateral relationships. However, today's Russian Federation is a different country, and the Europeans especially should have a vital interest in keeping this country on the path of democracy and modernisation. To be sure, Russia's democracy has been weakened and its society been suppressed under Mr Putin, but still Europe remains 'condemned' to cooperate with Russia.

It is inevitable that Europe should speak in one voice in its dialogue with Russia. But is Europe capable of pursuing a common policy vis-à-vis Russia? Currently, European-Russian relations are one of Europe's sore points which can only be cured by a common foreign and security policy.

Humanity's key problem of the 21st century is the unresolved energy question. Especially for the EU with its more than 300 million people and its developed economies, the energy supply is a sensitive subject. While access to the resources in the North Sea seems secure, most European energy imports come from insecure regions, such as the Persian Gulf, Africa, and the former Soviet states.

Therefore, Europe must look for other options and secure its oil supply from Russia, the Caspian region, and central Asia. However, Russia knows about its attractiveness as a supplier of energy and uses its oil and gas as a tool in its foreign policy. The European countries – especially the transit countries, i.e. the Baltic States and Poland – are at the mercy of this policy. They are forced to diversify their own energy sources and search for alternative supply routes. However, as Washington also predicates the supply of its oil to the Europeans on their participation in America's global projects, Europe is in a dilemma which constitutes a serious obstacle on the path towards a common foreign and security policy.

The Black Sea region is playing an ever-increasing role as it could be an energy bridge between Asia and Europe. In 2005, Rumania's president, Mr Băsescu, mooted the concept of a Bucharest-London-Washington axis, earning only criticism and irony for the way in which he presented his idea. Nor did the Black Sea Forum suggested by Rumania in 2006 cause much enthusiasm. However, the EU is now more receptive towards the issue. Thus, Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain are closely following developments in the region, even though the Black Sea project will probably remain a wish as the EU does not pursue a common Black Sea policy.

However, conditions in the EU for a common attitude towards this question have changed by now. In Germany, for example, the former special relationship with Russia that was initiated by Chancellor Schröder has been replaced under Chancellor Merkel by a new relationship which is defined within the European framework. What underlies this change is the insight that Germany's chances of securing its energy supply are also Europe's chances, and that individual member states are bound to fail if they go it alone. What is more, a common Black Sea policy

would include the east European states and commit Russia to open and democratic cooperation in the long run.

As it was especially affected by the breakdown of Yugoslavia, the situation in the western Balkan region also is of interest to Rumania's diplomacy. Thus, Bucharest has always been endeavouring in its foreign policy to support initiatives aiming at security and stability, regarding the independence of the new Balkan states as a prerequisite for security and reconstruction in the region. With more caution, the same argument was brought forward in the Kosovo question: Bucharest knows that the independence of the Kosovo is inevitable. However, it also knows that a new Kosovo state will hardly be able to exercise its own sovereignty, and that the lack of a common EU position on this question could even nurture instability in the region.

The EU must be seen as a global factor. When negotiations about the constitutional treaty were resumed, the CFSP was given a new impetus which engendered engagement even among the east European member countries. In Rumania, the army is being re-equipped, and the country is ready to participate in EU-led missions all around the world.

The present political constellation favours Rumania in consolidating its European and Euro-Atlantic policy and proving itself a responsible member of the EU and NATO. Now that integration has been completed, it is for Rumania's diplomacy to take the first step towards professionalisation. The Rumanian-American relationship must be rearranged in some details, and relations within the EU need to be redefined. It remains to be seen whether endeavours to tackle these tasks will be successful. However, the conditions are right.