

ROMANIA

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Ballistic Missile Defense System In Europe

THE ROMANIAN COMPONENT

An announcement that Romania had accepted the US's request of deploying elements of the American ballistic missile defense system in Europe to Romanian soil was made by President Traian Basescu after an extraordinary meeting of the Supreme Defense Council (CSAT) on February 4, 2010. The Romanian President assured the nation that the operation did not target Russia and that it was meant to protect the entire territory of the country against threats originating from the Middle East with several land-based rocket systems. The CSAT decision is pending Parliament approval under the Romanian law.

International context

The international context of the US proposal to Romania looks extremely complex. We have decided to set aside the consequences of the economic and financial crisis, the establishment of the G-20 as a global economic governance body or the consolidation of emerging powers' positions in the international system and to only discuss two main facts that are directly related to the set of issues raised by the US ballistic missile defense.

Of central importance is the reaching of the final phase in the US-Russian talks on a new START agreement on mutual reduction of strategic arms – START – to replace the one signed in the early 1990s of the last century. The new treaty will therefore logically apply to ballistic missile defense installations of either party, too. Credible sources close to negotiations have recently disclosed the fact that the START agreement would be signed before the spring.

The negotiations on the START agreement seem to be part of a new US policy in respect of Russia inaugurated by the Obama Administration and described as a 'resetting' of relations that had become rather strenuous in 2007-2008 (the American support for Ukraine and Georgia's NATO membership and Russia's undisguised opposition).

The decision of the Obama Administration of renouncing the deployment of the missile defense elements in Eastern Europe to Poland (interceptor missiles) and to the Czech Republic (radar) has been consistent with the same 'resetting' policy, which had previously triggered Moscow's fierce criticism. The choice of translating elements of the US ballistic missile defense southwards, towards Romania and other countries in the South East of Europe was made on the 17th of September 2009, being well received by Russia. Russian President D. Medvedev described the decision as 'responsible' and found a Russian-American co-operation on the SE Europe ballistic missile defense possible.¹ Concurrently, Russia gave up on deploying its Iskander missiles to the Kaliningrad enclave as a rebuff for the US equipment in Poland and the Czech Republic. US Secretary of Defense R. Gates mentioned that the Pentagon was considering Russia's contribution to the new missile defense system, including by integrating radar systems located in the southern part of the country,

¹ 'Le Monde', 17.09.09. , Obama enterre le bouclier antimissile imagine par Bush

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trying to ensure 'greater coverage to potential Iranian missile launches'.²

As a matter of fact, Obama made his announcement regarding the change of location for the US ballistic missile defense to the South of Europe in the context where it had been discovered that Iran was running secret uranium processing programs for military purposes. On the 26th of September, US, British and French leaders accused Iran of keeping secrecy over a nuclear fuel enrichment plant for several years. British PM Gordon Brown stated on the occasion that 'the level of deception by the Iranian government, and the scale of what we believe is the breach of international commitments will shock and anger the entire international community'.³

The natural conclusion that can be drawn from the aforementioned facts is that Moscow had, most probably, been informed of the US intention of installing ballistic missile system elements in Romania or that, at least, the announcement did not come as a major surprise to Russia.

Secondly, early in 2010, a mounting pressure could be appraised in the Iranian nuclear dossier. The issue coming up in this unending diplomatic ballet dance going on between Iran and the '5+1' Group (the UN Security Council's 5 permanent members and Germany) was Teheran's refusal to accept having its uranium enriched by other countries up to 20% and to import from third parties (France) the necessary uranium bars for peaceful use. Whilst, initially, Teheran had agreed to the proposal, which would have secured an important margin for international control, it has subsequently reconsidered it by attaching further conditions. During the "Wehrkunde" Security

Conference in Munich on the 7th of February, the Iranian foreign minister bluntly spoke in favor of relevant talks' being resumed; however, only two days later, the president of Iran ordered the commencement of the 20% uranium enrichment process. Tension mounted again and the US, France and Germany demanded pressure be augmented on Iran, adding they were ready to act even independently from the UN Security Council where China resists punitive measures. Iran's indifference to the threat of sanctions had turned into a pattern. The tactic by which Teheran eludes the threats is well-known. Teheran starts by showing willingness to make concessions, but carries on along the same line. The fact that there is no military option in the situation makes Iran feel safe to proceed in that way.⁴ Commenting on the Iranian conduct, 'The Financial Times Deutschland' was writing : 'Mottaki's/Iranian Foreign Minister/ offer is Iran's latest tactical manoeuvre in a long-term strategy: making bogus offers to the West in order to win time. Time in which Tehran can work on a nuclear weapon. ' European and North American public opinion is pushing for further economic sanctions on Iran outside the UN framework where China can block them.⁵

The preoccupation with finding a solution to the Iranian nuclear dossier, as well as the imperious need to take dissuasive measures against Teheran have expedited the US steps towards setting up elements of its ballistic missile defense system in Eastern Europe. They are meant to annihilate eventual nuclear strikes on European targets originating in Iran, a country that has equipped itself with approx. 2,200 Km range Shahab-3 missiles. The US has deployed similar elements to countries in the Gulf region. The time scale for having the

² 'The Washington Post', September 17, 2009, Obama to Scrap Bush-Era European Missile Shield Plan by Michael D. Shear, Ann Scott Tyson and Debbi Wilgoren

³ 'Leaders Warn Iran Over Nuclear Site', by David E. Sanger and Helene Cooper , The New York Times, September 26, 2009

⁴ Iranian Intransigence. Tehran Has Little Reason to Fear Sanctions, by Ulrike Putz , 'Spiegel International online',10.02.2010;

⁵ The World from Berlin 'The West Must Impose Sanctions on Iran This Month', Ibidem, 08.02.2010 ; On the 11th of February, the Iranian president declared Iran a 'nuclear power'.

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Romanian ballistic missile shield up and running – the year 2015 – roughly overlaps with the expected time in which Iran can develop nuclear weapons, in keeping with the worst-case scenario.

The two above-mentioned components of the current international situation are closely related. 'The Financial Times' was stating in a column published at about the same time that the Obama Administration was changing the location of its ballistic missile defense from Poland-the Czech Republic to the South: '.../Russia must harden its position on Iran's nuclear plans. The international community wants to force Iran into negotiations on this issue. Yet Russia looks set to let Teheran off the hook. Early in February, Iran responded to the international community's offer of talks with a letter that barely mentioned the nuclear issue at all. Serghei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister, said this <was something to work with> and ruled out the possibility of imposing sanctions. This was an absurd position to take.'⁶

Ballistic missile defence in Romania

Public record information suggests the US ballistic missile defence has, according to its successive development plans, the latest being from 2007, global scale and seeks to protect US and allied territories from nuclear launches from North Korea and Iran. Under the latest available plan, a third component - in Europe - became necessary, apart from the sites in Alaska and California. The original intention was to have it developed in Poland and the Czech Republic, but technological developments (the SM-3 missiles) and Iran's progress on developing medium and short-range ballistic missiles, as well as its co-operation with North Korea, made it necessary to amend (September 2009) initial plans.

⁶ CloseTime for Russia to show it is serious , in "Financial Times", September 16 2009

Elements of the third location in Europe will be deployed in four steps and will include Romania, too. In the first phase (by 2011), existing missiles will be deployed for defence against short and medium-range ballistic missiles. This is also going to be the stage when Aegis destroyers and interceptors (SM-3 Block 1A) are deployed to Southern Europe, as well as when a radar is planted near Iran. In the second phase (by 2015), advanced interceptor missiles (SM-3 Block 1B), adequate sensors, as well as land-based missiles (SM-3) will be deployed, all designed to complete the sea-based sites. In a third phase (2018), the coverage to short and medium-range ballistic missiles will be expanded with a new land-based site in Northern Europe (SM-3) and with SM-3 Block IIA interceptor missiles at both land and sea-based sites. This is the phase when the territories of all NATO allied states in Europe will be already covered. In a forth phase (2020), and additional capability will be deployed to cover against intercontinental range ballistic missiles (ICBM) launched from the Middle East and targeting the US.

Action throughout all the four phases of the development of the US ballistic missile defence system will be co-ordinated with NATO.⁷

As Romanian authorities have emphasised, Romania's involvement with the process will occur in the second phase, consisting of a land-based interceptor missiles (SM-3) site to become operational in 2015. Romania will not buy interceptor missiles, nor will it pay for the set-up of the site.⁸

⁷ US Department of Defense , Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report , February 2010, p.24; on p.5 images reproduced in the text referring to growing ballistic missile threats from Iran and North Korea;

⁸ US ballistic missile defense, first official explanations: Romania will not host radars or sea-based sites, but only land-based interceptor missiles. The cost of deployment and of setting up the site will be met by the US. Hot-News.ro, Tuesday, the 9th of February, 2010, Current Affairs | Essential;

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International reactions

Romania's announcement on the 4th of February was immediately picked up by international media, and interested chancelleries took position.

Russia's reaction was one of the promptest, yet with a noticeable gradation, trying to suggest it was reserving the last say on the evaluation of the implications of the event. One important statement is the one made by Russian FM Serghei Lavrov the following day, informing that Moscow was going to ask Washington for detailed explanations in the matter. 'We expect a comprehensive answer from our American partners, because the Montreux Convention regulates the Black Sea regime' said Lavrov. He referred to the ballistic missile defense agreements with the US, showing that both parties had agreed 'to embark on a joint assessment of nuclear proliferation threats and risks. We also think our European colleagues, including Germany, should join us in this endeavor.'⁹ Concurrently, expert analyses began to appear in the Russian press, noting that the planned installations in Romania would be a threat to Russia's ability of intimidation in the military area, culminating on the 9th of February with the statement by Russian Chief of General Staff, General Nikolai Makarov, according to whom 'contrary to Western leaders' assurances that the system would be for keeping security and not targeted at Russia, our opinion is an extremely negative one. The development of the system will be weakening our nuclear potential and not taking that into consideration would be a mistake on our part.'¹⁰ The implied meaning was that Russia would take counter-measures.

One noteworthy fact is that Russia has started speaking on two voices in the dossier. On the one hand, the Russian diplomacy has a somewhat more reserved attitude, leaving room for more flexibility, and, on the other hand, the military level is playing the 'scary' part. One possible explana-

tion for such cautious and potentially flexible stance taken by the Russian diplomacy is that negotiations on a new START agreement are comprehensive, according to official Washington information. On the 10th of February, the White House press secretary reported that Russia, President Medvedev personally, had not shown a special concern about the deployment of the US ballistic missile defense to Romania and that it was not going to be an obstacle in the way of the START-2 agreement. The US official emphasized that 'the idea that the implementation of the ballistic missile defense system is Romania is an obstacle in the way of START is completely not true'.¹¹

Coincidentally or not, the day after Romania made its announcement, Russian President D. Medvedev made the new Russian military doctrine official. It stipulates that the ballistic missile defense is a major threat to the security of the Russian state as it 'undermines global stability and violates the current balance of nuclear forces.'

Romania's strategic partners such as France have shown understanding for its decision of hosting land-based elements of the US ballistic missile. Secretary of State for European Affairs Pierre Lelouch has stated in an interview that 'the ballistic threat is a growing reality. Look at what is happening in Iran, the security of the European Union is being threatened, starting with the SE Europe which would be the most exposed part of it. Therefore, I can understand Romania's concerns very well. NATO offers us a combination of means to dissuade nuclear arming and not only. It is obvious that France had been informed of the decision Romania made on the 4th of February to host elements of the US ballistic missile defense on its territory.'¹²

As for the allied states in the region, Poland has recently given its agreement for the de-

⁹ ITAR-TASS, February 5, 2010;

¹⁰ Ibidem, February 9, 2010;

¹¹ Ballistic missile defence system. White House states Dimitri Medvedev has expressed no special concern, 'Romania Libera' online, February 10, 2010;

¹² Pierre Lellouche: Ballistic missile defence has to be conceived alongside Russia, 'Evenimentul zilei', February 12, 2010;

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ployment of 'Patriot' interceptor missiles of the US Army to a location situated some 70 Km south of the Russian enclave Kalinigrad. The event is quite meaningful for the regional solidarity in the area of security and for the pro-US orientation of the allied states in the region.¹³ Bulgaria also said, it would soon commence talks with the US in view of hosting a land-based site of the missile defense shield.¹⁴ In R. Moldova, the freshly removed from power Communists' Party is highly critical of Romania's decision and is practically inviting Russia to consider counter-measures in Trans-Dniester. On the other hand, talks/explanations regarding the new developments have taken place between Bucharest and Chisinau at an official level.

Overall, the way in which international reactions have assessed the Romanian decision suggests it is of a nature to strengthen international security. Russia has shown a certain degree of prudence determined by its global interests and has taken an easily understandable position.¹⁵

National Reactions

Reactions of the Romanian public opinion were also prompt. A possible mistake of the authorities is that they did not immediately launch a fast public information campaign to explain the meaning of the event and the

details of the bilateral agreement. Radio/TV broadcasters and the print media immediately started questioning the presidential announcement, following the hardly ended trajectory of the recent election campaign. They insisted on elements such as the costs of the decisions, advancing horrendous amounts Romania would have to contribute, the risks involved by the assumed freeze of relations with Russia even before knowing and correctly evaluating Moscow's response or the fact that the country would turn into a target for missile strikes. The authorities, however, have gradually informed the public, providing the necessary details for the understanding of the need to host ballistic missile shield components, to fulfill international obligations as a country (strategic partnership with the US signed in July 1997), of the agenda of specific bilateral negotiations, of costs, possible location, so on and so forth.

With regard to the national political spectrum, President Basescu's announcement caught the main opposition party PSD in full preparations for the congress to elect leading structures, which prevented it from voicing an official position. Two trends have nonetheless shaped up, but they are both in a fine-tuning phase. The former - probably representing a majority - chose to deal with the new reality in a pragmatic fashion, but did solicit a public debate on the decision, as well as transparency in the area of national security. The latter - illustrated by the position taken by the party's honorary president, deploring the lack of information on the matter - mentioned the need to possibly consult the population by national referendum (something the officials declined, invoking applicable legislation stating otherwise). The Liberal Party has expressed a favorable opinion on the CSAT decision through top representatives. The Parliament's specialized committee organized a special session where the foreign and defense ministers were invited to give details (the 11th of February).

Overall, prospects are good, suggesting that the Parliament would be in favour of the decision announced on the 4th of February. And yet, one possibility that cannot be over-

¹³ Jane's Defence Weekly, volume 47, issue 4, 27 January 2010, p.14;

¹⁴ PM Boiko Borisov supports Bulgaria's participation in the ballistic missile defense. US willing to negotiate with Sofia, HotNews.ro, February 12, 2010, [Current Affairs | International](#);

¹⁵ "The US has begun stepping up its anti-Iran propaganda to justify its decision to deploy missile shield in Europe " - see 'Tehran Times' : U.S. using anti-Iran disinfo to sell missile shield , February 7, 2010;

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ruled is that an unexpected change of the local political agenda - from the predominance of the economic and social factor to the foreign policy – might step up debate on all such matters.

Conclusions

From Romania's point of view, it is obvious that the implementation of some elements of the US ballistic missile defense system in its territory is a consolidation of national security. The link between the land-based and the sea-based sites of the European component of the US shield adds substantial meanings mainly to the consolidation of Romania's security along its navy dimension, knowing that the Black Sea aquarium is characterized by a 'regulated ambiguity' regarding the presence (as volume and time) of non-riparian allied naval forces in the event of a war and that Russia has opted out of the obligations stemming from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).

The international media have also stressed the fact that the way in which things unfold also marks Romania's definitive exit of the Russian sphere of influence¹⁶, which may be an exaggeration as its NATO and EU membership had already enshrined it.

Romania's decision also shows that Bucharest is fulfilling/honoring its obligations as an ally and strategic partner. The agreement can equally be appreciated as an expression of the vitality of the Romanian-American Strategic Partnership, but also as a sign of the fulfillment of its duties as a NATO ally, the ballistic missile shield in Romania expanding its protection 'umbrella' to cover other NATO allies in Europe. Poland and Bulgaria almost concomitantly acted in the same way as Romania, which shows a

promising regional ally solidarity for the European security in general and for the international visibility of Central and Eastern Europe in the field in particular.

In respect of national security, the Romanian decision has a number of possible meanings. It facilitates the pursuit of an active foreign policy along its Eastern dimension where it is called to behave like that from the point of view of being a NATO and EU border state. The maximized security offered to foreign investment has brought important economic benefits. Although it may look like a paradox, it also smoothens up a constructive kind of dialogue with Russia on bilateral and regional matters. This last benefit is also the result of an optimized strategic profile of Romania by the decision made. The consolidation of Romanian connections with regions of great strategic interest for its national security like the Greater Middle East or the Greater Black Sea Basin achieved by connecting defense sites located on its territory to sites of the entire US shield in Europe is another noteworthy fact.

Romania's international importance will unquestionably be augmented in the context defined by the deployment of the US ballistic missile defense in Europe.

Of course that there is also the reality of national security threats growing as well, as the new sites could become potential 'targets' for 'the other side', but that is a natural process given the conditions of the non-divisiveness of international security and allied regional co-operation.

The implementation of elements of the US ballistic missile defense in Europe opens a new phase in the consolidation of the security of Romania and equally of the Old Continent.

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¹⁶ Russian interests loom large as Biden visits eastern Europe Poland and Romania have cautiously welcomed President Obama's new proposal for a missile shield system, during a visit to eastern Europe by Joe Biden, the US vice-president. , by Jonathan Liew, 23 Oct 2009, 'The Telegraph', UK;