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# Romania's trilateral cooperation formats

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## Romania's trilateral cooperation formats<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The Foreign Affairs Section of the Government Programme of the current Executive, applicable as of 23 June 2025, prioritises the consolidation of trilateral cooperation mechanisms, with particular emphasis on the Romania–Republic of Moldova–Ukraine and Romania–Poland–Türkiye formats. These frameworks are designed to enhance regional interconnectivity across strategic sectors, including transport, energy, trade, cybersecurity, cross-border security, and the protection of national minorities. The analysis is situated within the broader security reconfiguration generated by Russia's war against Ukraine, which has reshaped interstate relations and recalibrated regional cooperation architectures throughout Europe. In this evolving environment, trilateral formats serve as instruments to advance shared strategic objectives and as platforms to align national interests with broader Euro-Atlantic priorities. Romania's geostrategic positioning plays a central role in this process. Beyond its role as a cultural intersection, Romania must be conceptualised as a strategic outpost of the EU and NATO on the Union's Eastern flank, with both operational advantages and security responsibilities. Consequently, the country's trilateral cooperation formats are fundamentally shaped by the opportunities and constraints arising from this geostrategic status.

**Keywords:** trilateral cooperation, Romania, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Bulgaria, Türkiye.

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<sup>1</sup> This publication draws exclusively on open-source materials. The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the institution.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Foreign Affairs Section of the Government Programme of the current Executive, applicable as of 23 June 2025, provides for the “strengthening of trilateral formats, particularly the Romania–Republic of Moldova–Ukraine trilateral and the Romania–Poland–Türkiye trilateral.” These formats are advantageous in terms of opportunities to deepen regional interconnectivity in strategic sectors and services, including transport, energy, trade, cybersecurity, cross-border security, and the protection of national minorities. In the context of Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine, the security climate in Europe has been radically transformed, leading to a reconfiguration of state relations and, implicitly, of regional cooperation formats, with some pursuing new objectives and interests while others continue to pursue existing ones.

Romania’s geostrategic position has always been a fundamental criterion in the formulation of foreign policy. At present, Romania is not only a space of cultural interference but must primarily be conceptualised as an outpost of the EU and NATO in Eastern Europe, bearing both advantages and responsibilities. The implications (consequences) of the geostrategic position are a basic determinant in the establishment of Romania’s trilateral formats.

### **ROMANIA – REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA – UKRAINE**

A country on the periphery of the European Union and NATO, Romania has a 649.4 km border with Ukraine and a 681.3 km eastern frontier with the Republic of Moldova. The Romania–Republic of Moldova–Ukraine trilateral was created at Romania’s initiative to advance shared regional policy objectives, and, equally, to enable each participant to maximise its interests through cooperation with the other states in the new context created by Russian military aggression. The three countries pursue advanced integration into European commercial, transport, energy, and educational networks. Romania has assumed the role of a provider of expertise and a logistical connector for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to Central European and Western countries.



Trilateral meetings at the level of foreign ministers took place on: 15 September 2022 – Odesa; 13 April 2023 – Bucharest; 15 July 2024 – Chişinău; 8 August 2025 – Chernivtsi. In September 2022, the trilateral was launched, the first major topic of discussion being the energy connectivity of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to European Union networks (Calea Europeană, 2022). The joint communiqué adopted by participants condemned Russian military aggression against Ukraine, affirmed the primacy of international law in relation to Moscow's territorial revisionism, and outlined diplomatic actions in support of Ukraine to restore border integrity (Calea Europeană, 2022).

During the second trilateral meeting, on regional security, hosted by Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu in Bucharest, a Joint Declaration was signed, emphasising the “commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine within internationally recognised borders. It also reiterates that the Black Sea represents an important region of strategic interest for the security not only of the region but of the Euro-Atlantic space as a whole” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 2023). Thus, Romania supports the basic attributes of statehood: territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, independence, sovereignty, and a functional public administration.

The Joint Declaration provided for the deepening of trilateral relations in strategic areas such as the “political as well as the economic, infrastructure, defence, security, and cultural fields and records the evident fact that we share similar visions regarding a stable and secure Black Sea. We also express our desire for our cooperation to be strengthened, including with regard to combating the effects of Russia's war against Ukraine, as well as countering Russian propaganda, disinformation, and strengthening our resilience.” Other topics discussed included: the creation of a sanctions regime dedicated to combating destabilisation and attacks against the constitutional order of the Republic of Moldova, the Transnistrian dossier, and the resilience of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova under the EU and NATO “umbrella” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 2023).

The July 2024 meeting in Chişinău addressed energy issues, infrastructure modernisation, and countering disinformation. Ongoing energy projects that contribute to the interconnection of energy markets and to increased electricity production in the region were discussed. Trilateral discussions also focused on joint projects to develop modern, resilient, and sustainable transport infrastructure (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, 2024).



At the most recent meeting, held in Chernivtsi in August 2025, participants emphasised the importance of capitalising on investments in cross-border connectivity and on future economic opportunities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 2025a). The progress achieved by the two EU candidate countries was highlighted, together with Romania's commitments to supporting the fulfilment of this objective. Trade relations are considered a means of accelerating European integration, both the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine having Free Trade Agreements with the European Union.

The post-2022 period saw consolidation of trade with the EU through the “Solidarity Corridors,” an alternative conceived to circumvent Moscow's blockage of maritime transport routes for goods. Romania, given its direct border with the two states, is a key participant in this project, primarily by ensuring the security of Ukrainian grain shipments through the Port of Constanța. This initiative is not only a trilateral response to the Kremlin's coercive actions but also represents a catalyst for integration into the European Single Market for the two countries (Calea Europeană, 2024a).

Romania also supports the Republic of Moldova in meeting its electricity needs, given that its production capacity is located in Transnistria and cooperation with regional authorities is difficult. On 16 March 2022, due to the war in Ukraine, the electricity systems of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova were urgently synchronised with the Continental European Power System (ENTSO-E). The action was coordinated by Moldelectrica, Ukrenergo, and ENTSO-E transmission system operators, marking a crucial moment in the technical and operational integration process of the Republic of Moldova into the European energy network. A key strategic element in the full transition to the continental European distribution system is the development and strengthening of cross-border interconnections with Romania, ensuring both technical integration and direct access to the European energy market (Energy Analytical Studies, 2025).

Regarding the protection of the Romanian minority in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Rada adopted, on 5 December 2025, a law that includes the Romanian language on the list of protected languages in the country. At the same time, the so-called Moldovan language – an old instrument of Soviet influence – lost this status. However, representatives of Romanians in Ukraine warn that Romanian-language courses must be maintained, especially in the Odesa region (Europa Liberă România, 2025).



## **ROMANIA – POLAND – TÜRKIYE**

Cooperation among Romania, Poland, and Türkiye is ongoing, with periodic ministerial-level meetings to assess progress. The first Romania–Poland–Türkiye trilateral summit took place at Romania’s initiative, at the level of State Secretary for Strategic Affairs, in May 2012, on the margins of the NATO Chicago Summit. The creation of this format recognized the importance of deepened cooperation among the three states on issues of common interest, particularly in the field of security, and was dedicated to coordination within the North Atlantic Alliance.

In June 2024, at the trilateral meeting of foreign ministers, Romanian Minister Luminița Odobescu reaffirmed the need for a close relationship with Alliance partners, regardless of the extent to which they are affected by Russia’s war against Ukraine. She insisted on supporting Ukraine’s and the Republic of Moldova’s European path well and on the efficient use of all existing European instruments (Calea Europeană, 2024b).

## **ROMANIA – BULGARIA – TÜRKIYE**

Cooperation began at Bulgaria’s initiative (June 1997), and the first high-level meeting took place in Varna on 3 October 1997. The dimensions of cooperation are political, security, and economic. The political dimension is underscored by shared interests and commitments to advance cooperation, good neighbourliness, and democracy in the region. The security dimension materialises through cooperation to combat organised crime and illegal trafficking in weapons, drugs, and persons. To achieve these objectives, a series of relevant documents were signed: the Agreement on cooperation between the governments of the three countries on combating terrorism, corruption, illicit trafficking, and money laundering (Antalya, 17 April 1998), followed by the Protocol on cooperation for providing assistance in humanitarian emergencies (Çeşme, Türkiye, 15 May 2002) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 2025b). The economic dimension focuses on intensifying cooperation in transport and energy infrastructure, economic and trade exchanges, and developing collaboration in tourism. On 11 July 1998, the trilateral meeting at the prime-ministerial level took place in Sofia, and on 12 March 1999, the Trilateral Cooperation Agreement in Tourism was signed in Sinaia.

Romania hosted the 6th Summit on 3–4 June 2003, in Neptun. On this occasion, the Joint Declaration was adopted, reconfirming the importance and viability of high-level political dialogue in a trilateral format both for cooperation among Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye and for the stability and security of South-Eastern Europe.

The security dimension of the trilateral became prioritised after the Russian invasion. On 11 January 2024, during an official ceremony in Istanbul, Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye signed the Memorandum establishing the MCM Black Sea cooperation format (Mine Counter-Measures Task Group Black Sea). Its purpose is to detect and remove mines in the Black Sea, ensuring safe navigation. The agreement has been implemented since 1 July 2024 (Defense Romania, 2024).

Due to the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the threat posed by drifting mines deployed by both states has increased, affecting navigation safety and civilian security, as demonstrated by numerous incidents recorded in the Black Sea near Romania's borders (Defense Romania, 2024). It is the first agreement of this kind concluded after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, of which the Russian Federation is not a part. The Romanian Naval Forces are responsible for 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> of territorial waters, the contiguous zone (the strip of sea adjacent to territorial waters extending up to 24 nautical miles), and the exclusive economic zone (Curs de Guvernare, 2024).

## OTHER TRILATERAL COOPERATION FORMATS

Other trilateral cooperation formats, functioning since the 1990s but currently of secondary importance, include:

- **Romania – Bulgaria – Greece:** launched on 26 August 1995 through a foreign ministers' meeting in Ioannina (Greece). Cooperation functioned predominantly at the head-of-state or government level. Objectives: political dialogue on regional developments; economic cooperation in transport and energy infrastructure; regional stability; combating illegal migration, drug trafficking, and organised crime; internal affairs cooperation—on 8 September 1998, in Sofia, the Protocol on combating cross-border crime was signed; joint disaster emergency response.



- **Romania – Hungary – Serbia:** launched through a meeting of foreign ministers (Belgrade, 30 May 2003). Objectives include: transferring experience and know-how across the governmental, parliamentary, and local levels; identifying common border management issues; and jointly operationalising the Beba Veche (Triplex Confinium) border crossing as a model of border control cooperation.
- **Romania – Italy – Serbia:** functions within the Central European Initiative since 2002, aiming at economic cooperation.
- **Romania – Ukraine – Poland:** the initiative belonged to Romania; it was launched in Bucharest on 26 November 1997 at the presidential level. It aims at: strengthening political and economic dialogue; building infrastructure projects (especially road transport); combating organised crime, illegal trafficking, and illegal migration.
- **Romania – Bulgaria – Serbia:** cooperation mainly conducted within the “Danube 21” Association, addressing shared peripheral development challenges—weak infrastructure, agricultural dependence, low economic development, and high unemployment. Meetings took place in Vidin (2002) and Calafat (2004), the latter adopting a Joint Declaration encouraging cross-border cooperation.

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# IDR

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