# ROMÂNIA OCCIDENTALĂ

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## ROMANIA
## WHERE THE NORTH MEETS THE SOUTH

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## THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL



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# SUMMARY

# EDITORIAL

**Valentin Quintus Nicolescu**

The chosen theme for this issue of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute's review, "Romania – Where the North Meets the South," is not just a geographical metaphor, but also brings into discussion a definition of our strategic vocation. We live in times when classic labels, such as "East" and "West," although relevant, no longer fully capture the complexity of international interactions. A new dynamic, that between the developed, democratic "North" and the global "South," with its diversity of economic and political trajectories, is becoming increasingly prominent. Romania, through its history, culture, and its geostrategic and geoeconomic positioning, finds itself at the intersection of these worlds.

Firmly anchored in the security and values space of the North, as a member state of the European Union and NATO, Romania is a pillar of stability on the Eastern Flank. This belonging is not just a foreign policy and defense option, but a profound, assumed reality that defines our profile as a predictable partner and a reliable ally. Our commitments within these structures represent the compass of our external action and, at the same time, the guarantee of our democratic path. The future of European security, as has become particularly evident in recent years, is also decided at the Black Sea, a region of strategic importance for the North Atlantic Alliance.

However, Romania's identity is not complete without acknowledging its southern resonances. Our Latinity connects us culturally and linguistically to an entire family of nations, including in Latin America, creating bridges of understanding that transcend geography. At the same time, our historical heritage, including centuries of complicated interactions with diverse empires and civilizations, as well as the relatively recent experience of the post-communist transition, offers us a nuanced perspective on the challenges faced by many states in the global South: institutional consolidation, economic development, and navigating an often unpredictable international environment.

Having successfully navigated the complex process of post-communist economic and political transition, Romania possesses a lived, institutional, and societal experience that resonates deeply with the challenges facing many nations in the Global South today. We have a historical understanding of the traumas caused by radical economic restructuring, the immense difficulty of building solid and independent democratic institutions from scratch, or the fight against endemic corruption and the social shock that accompanies such a rapid and fundamental change – not as a distant historical case study or a theory formulated in academic circles, but as our own hard-won recent past.

This recent history gives Bucharest a unique form of credibility in the North-South dialogue. When Romania speaks on issues of good governance, strengthening institutional capacity, democratic transition, and economic reform, it does so not as a former colonial power or an established global hegemon, but as an equal who has recently completed a remarkably similar journey. This perspective is not marked by a colonial past or the burden of post-imperial guilt. It is a practical, unaltered perspective of a nation that has managed to rise from an authoritarian regime and economic collapse to become a stable, high-income democracy, integrated into the most powerful political and economic bloc in the world.

Romania's aforementioned historical experiences and overlapping identities consolidate an exceptional capital of trust, built on traditional relations of friendship and cooperation with partners in the Global South. Thus, Romania's vocation to be a space where North and South not only meet, but also dialogue and cooperate in a real and honest way, is the most valuable diplomatic capital we have in the 21st century. It is not a position of ambiguous neutrality, but one of active engagement, based on a complex identity. And this is because we are a country of the North, which has a deep understanding, derived from its own experience, of the aspirations and challenges of the South. From this perspective, Romania is in a privileged position to build bridges of dialogue, a potential facilitator and mediator within the European Union, able to promote a more nuanced, empathetic, and effective understanding of the diverse perspectives of the Global South. For example, when discussing the challenges of democratic consolidation, Romania can share its own experiences in building a vibrant civil society and an independent judicial system, but also the challenges it faces today in terms of consolidating and strengthening the resilience of the fragile democratic edifice. In conversations about economic diversification, it can highlight its own success in attracting foreign investment and developing new *high-tech* sectors. On the critical issue of energy transition, Romania's experience in phasing out its dependence on coal and developing its renewable energy capacity is an extremely relevant and practical example for many developing nations. And the examples could go on.

Finally, Romania's relevance in the increasingly important dialogue between North and South will not be given by the size of its aid budget or its military power, but by the strategic and intelligent use of its unique historical narrative and its experience of post-communist transition as a development path. For decades, Romania's foreign policy was about "returning" to the West. Now, its greatest value may lie in its ability to turn to the South, not with the ideological baggage of the past, but with the hard-won wisdom of its own successful transformation.

The present issue of the *România Occidentală* review is a living testimony to this role of confluence played by our country. The valuable contributions we host perfectly illustrate Romania's ability to be a forum for dialogue and a point of connection between very varied horizons. We have managed to bring together extremely diverse voices, both from the diplomatic space and from the academic and expert area, which offer a plurality of visions and extremely valuable perspectives on the North-South dialogue, on international cooperation or on particular aspects of history, or of recent regional developments.

The Romanian Diplomatic Institute, through this editorial endeavor, aims to continue exploring these themes, facilitating an open and informed dialogue. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our distinguished collaborators for their valuable perspectives, which enrich the debate and help us to better understand the complexity of the world in which we live, but also the role that Romania is called to play on the global stage.

# SCIENTIFIC DIPLOMACY AS A MECHANISM FOR MITIGATING THE NORTH-SOUTH TECHNOLOGICAL DIVIDE

**Andrei Luca**

**ABSTRACT:** *This article explores the potential of scientific diplomacy to mitigate the persistent North-South technological divide, a significant source of global inequality and geopolitical tension. It highlights how new disruptive technologies threaten to further widen this gap, emphasizing the urgent need for new international cooperation instruments. The text discusses the evolution of science diplomacy from a traditional cooperative vision focused on shared knowledge and solutions, to a newer competitive paradigm driven by national interests and technological supremacy. It then details the European Union's pioneering effort to formalize a balanced framework that integrates both approaches, aiming to foster equitable partnerships and build scientific capacity in the Global South.*

**KEYWORDS:** *scientific diplomacy; technological divide; Global North and South; international cooperation; European Union*

The technological divide between the Global North and the Global South constitutes one of the most enduring and structurally embedded forms of global inequality, with far-reaching implications for contemporary configurations of power and the intensification of geopolitical tensions. Despite sustained initiatives by various international stakeholders aimed at fostering a more equitable distribution of the benefits derived from technological innovation – often framed within the discourse of the promotion of inclusive access to technological advancements – recent technological breakthroughs have largely failed to recalibrate the global asymmetries rooted in historically unequal patterns of access to scientific and technological resources. This persistent disparity has engendered a structural technological fault line, one that not only constrains the developmental trajectories and economic resilience of numerous states in the Global South, but also undermines the collective international capacity to formulate and implement effective responses to transnational and systemic challenges.

The international community began to systematically address the issue of the technological divide as early as the late 1960s, when the intensification of technology transfer to the Global South was increasingly advocated by both governmental and non-governmental actors as a necessity in the context of growing polarization in global economic development. However, subsequent technology transfers were significantly constrained by the geopolitical fragmentation of the Cold War era, occurring primarily within the confines of the two dominant ideological blocs and adhering to the logic of bipolarity.

Notably, certain exceptions emerged – such as the case of the "Asian Tigers" – where industrialization was successfully pursued through domestically driven policy frameworks. Although later instances of technological catch-up included countries with significant demographic weight, such as China – thereby altering the demographic share of the global population that had previously faced significant technological disadvantage – the scientific and technological divide between the North and the South has remained substantial.

This structural cleavage was further compounded by the emergence of the so-called "digital divide." While digitalization and the spread of information technologies enabled some countries in the Global South to leapfrog over certain stages of technological development, the exceptionally rapid pace of innovation cycles has largely prevented a meaningful closing of the gap.

In the current phase of global technological development, the emergence of disruptive fields – such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biotechnology – predominantly controlled by a small group of actors within advanced economies, threatens to further widen the technological gap between the Global North and South. This gap has evolved into a complex web of inequalities encompassing innovation capacity, digital infrastructure, and the ability to harness data and knowledge effectively. For the Global South, these deficiencies stem not only from a lack of financial resources but also from entrenched systemic challenges, including the chronic underfunding of higher education and research, brain drain, and public policies that are often inconsistent or poorly aligned with the needs and input of local scientific communities.

In this context, the identification of new instruments for international cooperation – or the reassessment of existing ones – emerges as a necessity for mitigating these structural inequalities, through the promotion of innovative and integrated approaches aimed at fostering equitable partnerships and facilitating shared technological progress. Among these mechanisms, scientific diplomacy currently stands out as the most promising.

Although the practice itself has deep historical roots, the concept of *science diplomacy* is of relatively recent origin. It was formally articulated in the 2000s by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), which also established the first Center for Science Diplomacy in 2008. The landmark 2010 report *New Frontiers in Science Diplomacy*, jointly published by the AAAS and the Royal Society, played a pivotal role in conceptualizing science diplomacy as a distinct instrument of international relations, closely linked to the notion of *soft power*.

Since that moment, the concept of science diplomacy has garnered increasing attention, being progressively adopted and endorsed by a growing number of governments and international organizations. An ever-larger group of states from the Global South – particularly from Asia, Africa, and Latin America – have joined this discourse, representing perspectives that were virtually absent in 2010.

The widening participation in global debates concerning the role of science diplomacy has reinforced its function as an instrument of foreign policy, used to build bridges between countries, facilitate knowledge transfer, and promote collective solutions to shared challenges.

Over the past decade, a cooperative vision has traditionally dominated both the theoretical and practical frameworks of science diplomacy. Within this cooperative paradigm, scientific research is viewed as a universal enterprise in which scientists across the globe share common methods, values, and a shared epistemological language. As such, scientists are often regarded as privileged actors capable of fostering peaceful dialogue among states, given that cross-border collaboration is a foundational principle of scientific activity. From this perspective, science is valued for its objectivity, the public trust it inspires, and its capacity to generate neutral data that can support informed political decision-making. This approach projects an image of science as a domain committed to the public good – relatively autonomous from political pressures – where competition occurs primarily at the level of ideas, transcending national boundaries. In this spirit, collaborative research initiatives contribute to the strengthening of international relations and offer technological solutions that often surpass the financial or institutional capabilities of individual states. Moreover, such initiatives can serve as platforms for dialogue between countries in conflict, including in sensitive areas such as water resource management, air pollution, or nuclear safety.

Naturally, such a cooperative vision holds significant potential for reducing technological disparities between the Global North and South, and is consequently valued within the broader framework of global dialogue on this issue. This vision received a substantial boost with the formal launch of an initiative by UNESCO – the United Nations body with primary competence in scientific cooperation and interministerial dialogue on science diplomacy. The first meeting within this process took place on March 26, 2025, at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The discussions – as well as the declaration adopted – highlighted the urgent need to prioritize collaboration by establishing ethical and sustainable frameworks for scientific cooperation. Such efforts aim to reduce competition among various actors and reinforce public trust in science. Moreover, the debates emphasized the importance of leveraging science and diplomacy to effectively address an increasing number of global crises, while also enhancing the international community's capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to both current and future challenges. In this spirit, Romania advocated for the promotion of inclusive and flexible partnership frameworks designed to encourage cross-sectoral dialogue among scientists, diplomats, public policy decision-makers, and – an increasingly vital stakeholder under current conditions – the entrepreneurial sector.

However, the recent development of emerging disruptive technologies, coupled with the current geopolitical context, has brought to the forefront a "competitive" vision in which science diplomacy is strategically deployed to advance national interests, particularly those related to enhancing economic competitiveness and achieving technological autonomy vis-à-vis other states. This competitive paradigm reconfigures science diplomacy as an instrument of foreign and security policy. From this perspective, science is construed as a strategic resource leveraged by diplomacy to operate in terms of power projection and competitive advantage – an approach that may come into tension with the normative principles of openness and collaboration traditionally associated with scientific research.

At present, the geopolitical arena is increasingly defined by intense competition for technological supremacy, driven by the emergence of new global and regional actors within a marketplace once dominated by a single power. In this global race for innovation, technology has acquired the status of a strategic asset, rivaling both military and economic power, and geopolitical rivalries are increasingly being transposed into technological rivalries.

The use of science and technology as tools in this competition transforms them into extensions of national interests, vital for maintaining an innovative edge, ensuring state security and enhancing international prestige.

A key aspect of technological competition in this new framework is the unequal access to cutting-edge technologies, where the player who has achieved a competitive lead in a field will identify a strategic dividend in restricting its diffusion even when immediate economic considerations would recommend it. Technology becomes a diplomatic bargaining chip, as access to critical technologies can be used as a lever of influence or a tool of sanction.

It is important to recognize that there are distinct perspectives on science diplomacy, between the competitive and the cooperative approach. For a balanced approach, it appears necessary to harmonize the two in a single perspective in which they are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

The European Union is the first major global actor to have recently formalized such an approach in a programmatic document that aims to redesign the European framework for science diplomacy. At the informal Competitiveness Council meeting in 2023, research ministers from the EU Member States addressed science diplomacy at political level for the first time, emphasizing the need for Europe's active involvement and supporting the development of an ambitious European framework in this field. It was decided that the development of the future European framework should follow a bottom-up logic, through a participatory process, by setting up informal working groups with the participation of selected scientists and diplomats from the Member States.

Romania has been involved in this process from its initial stages, being represented in the working groups and holding, from 2023, the Presidency of the network of science diplomacy officers from the ministries of foreign affairs of the EU Member States, a structure set up with the idea of strengthening the diplomatic dimension of this process. Romania is also one of the 15 members of the Informal Steering Group set up in 2022 to advise the European Commission on the development of a European Framework for Science Diplomacy.

As a result of this process, the report "A European Framework for Science Diplomacy" was launched by the end of 2024, setting out the framework and the roadmap for strengthening an integrated and effective European science diplomacy. It proposes a new vision, in which science diplomacy is strategically articulated as a component of European foreign policy.

It starts, on the one hand, from the realization that science and technology have inevitably become part of the global competition for political, economic and military influence, especially among the major international actors. The strategic value of knowledge and the way in which it is exploited in the great power competition has made new scientific knowledge as well as emerging and disruptive technologies - such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing or gene editing - key geopolitical tools. They directly influence the Union's strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty.

This reality imposes a number of filters on scientific cooperation, because the pressures of geopolitical and economic competition in sensitive technological areas require adequate protection of research. The openness of science must be subject to critical scrutiny, particularly in relation to competing economic actors, so as to avoid exclusive dependence on technologies from outside Europe.

At the same time, it is clear that society as a whole and the scientific community in particular will only gain from the free dissemination of research results, and European science diplomacy has not only the potential to stimulate this effect globally, but also the potential to help bridge the technological gap between North and South.

Against this backdrop of perceived opposing forces, the report proposes a balanced vision in which cooperation and competition are not mutually exclusive. It proposes an asymmetric vision, based on the congruence of vision between the Union and other states, which regulates the intensity, instruments and objectives of cooperation. In seeking to strike the right balance between international research cooperation and the protection of strategic interests, the principle of scientific cooperation "as open as necessary and as closed as necessary" is maintained and nuanced according to the objectives of a given sector or geographical area.

In the specific area of reducing inequalities and strengthening the dialogue between the Global North and the Global South, the level of ambition of the EU is formulated in line with the history, scientific potential and cooperative nature of the European project. The promoted recipe combines the enhancement of existing instruments (such as Horizon Europe, Global Gateway or Open Science policies) with a new strategic vision for science diplomacy based on equitable partnerships and co-production of knowledge, strengthening the scientific capacity of the Global South and thus contributing to a more equitable international order.

This involves not only knowledge transfer from North to South, but also the recognition of local knowledge, co-production of science and institutional capacity building in the global South. One of the key objectives is to support the strengthening of local capacities for innovation and research so as to move beyond the current model where many countries in the South are mere "consumers" of technology produced in the North. In contrast to traditional models of development assistance, the EU's proposed science diplomacy aims to ensure that the global South is not just a beneficiary, but an equal partner in the knowledge generation process.

In the current situation, the lack of capacity of Southern countries not only to generate meaningful innovation, but even to adapt, control or replicate innovation from the North, perpetuates dependence and creates strategic vulnerability to global crises affecting the South and the North alike.

This is a state of affairs that requires broad partnerships involving not only governments and international organizations, but also universities, research institutes and civil society, as part of an interconnected ecosystem geared towards equity and sustainability. In this respect, it is precisely a distinctive element of science diplomacy that presupposes the quasi-obligatory involvement of non-state actors with resources, information and expertise, which goes beyond the framework of traditional diplomacy.

Romania is already part of the EU's financial, institutional and diplomatic mechanisms that can be strategically harnessed to reduce the technological gap between North and South. The principle promoted by the EU's new approach is the pooling of Member States' resources in third countries, both in terms of official representation and other actors such as the scientific diaspora, alumni networks or local researchers who have studied in Member States. From this perspective, Romania can make a relevant contribution, but once the new European strategy in this area is operationalized in the coming years, it will have to be matched by an increase in the resources allocated, in line with the efforts and resources already made available by other Member States.

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# TURKMENISTAN'S NEUTRALITY AND *SOFT POWER*: A MODEL FOR PEACEFUL INFLUENCE

**Gulayym Beghanova**

**ABSTRACT:** *This article explores Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality as a central pillar of its soft power strategy and a distinctive model for peaceful influence in contemporary international relations. Declared as a deliberate foreign policy choice post-independence in 1991, Turkmenistan's neutral status is internationally recognized, enshrined in its Constitution, and was unanimously ratified by the UN General Assembly in 1995. This commitment represents stability, predictability, and trustworthiness, serving as an effective instrument for fostering global peace, cooperation, and sustainable development. Turkmenistan actively leverages its neutrality through platforms like the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy, contributing to regional conflict prevention, and enhancing global transport and energy security. The UN's recognition of December 12 as the International Day of Neutrality and the upcoming "International Year of Peace and Trust" in 2025 highlight its enduring global significance.*

**KEYWORDS:** *neutrality; Turkmenistan; soft power; peace*

In today's dynamic international relations landscape, soft power has emerged as a crucial tool for nations seeking to amplify their global influence without resorting to coercion or military force. For Turkmenistan, neutrality is not just a principle of foreign policy; it is the cornerstone of its soft power strategy. Over the past three decades, the nation's permanent neutrality has evolved into a powerful instrument for fostering international peace and cooperation. The concept of Turkmen neutrality has become a subject of study for international relations scholars, a point of analysis for policymakers, and a subject of celebration within academic institutions, think tanks, and diplomatic circles.

Thirty years after adopting permanent neutrality, Turkmenistan's commitment to this status has gained even more prominence on the global stage. Today, Turkmen neutrality must be understood not just in the context of one nation's history, but in the broader framework of international relations. In a world marked by complex social, economic, and environmental challenges, Turkmenistan's model of positive neutrality has proven to be an effective approach in addressing these issues, while promoting the common interests of humanity.

## *SOFT POWER* AND NEUTRALITY: THE BASIS FOR STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

*Soft power*, as defined by political scientist Joseph Nye, is the ability of a nation to attract and persuade others rather than coerce them. For Turkmenistan, neutrality itself is a formidable asset of soft power. Recognized internationally and enshrined in the nation's Constitution, Turkmenistan's neutral status represents stability, predictability, and trustworthiness - qualities that are increasingly scarce in today's fragmented global environment.

Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality was declared during peacetime, not as a reaction to ongoing conflicts but as a deliberate choice made by the Turkmen people. When Turkmenistan declared independence in 1991, it faced a pivotal question: What direction should our foreign policy take? As our President has emphasized, a nation's foreign policy can significantly impact its survival and future. In examining Turkmenistan's history and culture, neutrality emerged as the most fitting foreign policy approach. This strategic decision has garnered broad support globally, facilitating a constructive and transparent foreign policy agenda for the nation.

## TURKMENISTAN'S NEUTRALITY: A GLOBAL ASSET

The neutrality of Turkmenistan - characterized as "recognized" in origin, "permanent" in form, and "positive" in meaning - was unanimously ratified by the UN General Assembly. On December 12, 1995, the Assembly recognized Turkmenistan's neutrality as an international legal status, affirming its commitment to peace, mutual respect, and human rights principles long cherished by the Turkmen people. These humanitarian values are embedded in the framework of Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality, reinforcing its vital role in promoting global peace and sustainable development.

The international community recognizes that Turkmenistan's "model" of neutrality aligns seamlessly with the objectives of global development and the core principles of the United Nations. In 2007, with the support of all Central Asian states, Turkmenistan played a pivotal role in the establishment of the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, headquartered in Ashgabat. This Center serves as a platform for dialogue and collaboration to prevent potential regional conflicts, contributing to the development of more robust and effective regional relations in Central Asia.

## AN INCLUSIVE PARADIGM OF DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

A central strength of Turkmenistan's neutral foreign policy is its openness to the world. For neutrality to have a positive impact on international relations, it must be widely recognized and embraced. Turkmenistan understood early on that neutrality could not remain an abstract concept but needed to be actively communicated and reinforced through engagement with the international community. This is why, from the earliest days of its independence, Turkmenistan sought to clarify its foreign policy choices at global forums.

Turkmenistan's first official declaration on neutrality was made at the 1992 Helsinki summit of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. In 1995, at the Islamabad summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization, Turkmenistan's initiative for permanent neutrality was formally welcomed. Later that year, Turkmenistan joined the Non-Aligned Movement, which expressed its support in the Cartagena Declaration. On December 12, 1995, Turkmenistan's neutrality was endorsed by 185 member states of the United Nations.

Throughout these years, Turkmenistan has played a constructive role in resolving regional conflicts, particularly in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. In 2015, the 20th anniversary of Turkmenistan's neutrality was marked by reaffirmation of its status through a UN General Assembly resolution. Turkmenistan's commitment to peace and neutrality was further highlighted when the UN declared December 12 as the International Day of Neutrality in 2017.

## A FUTURE OF PEACE, COOPERATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY

In 2025, Turkmenistan will celebrate the 30th anniversary of its permanent neutrality, a milestone that holds great significance for the nation. The UN General Assembly has recognized Turkmenistan's neutral status through several resolutions, including Resolution 50/80A in 1995, reaffirmed in 2015, and most recently in March 2025. These resolutions are not mere symbolic gestures; they are a testament to the global community's acknowledgment of the value that Turkmenistan's neutrality brings to international stability, peace, and cooperation.

Turkmenistan's neutrality is the first and only neutral status to be officially recognized by the UN General Assembly. However, Turkmenistan's commitment to neutrality extends beyond the United Nations platform. The country is an active and constructive partner in international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Economic Cooperation Organization, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Through these platforms, Turkmenistan promotes the principles of friendship, cooperation, and the denuclearization of global politics.

## NEUTRALITY AS A CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATION

Turkmenistan's neutrality is also firmly rooted in its Constitution. The preamble of the Constitution vows to strengthen the internationally recognized status of permanent neutrality. Article 2 declares neutrality as the foundation of Turkmenistan's domestic and foreign policy, while Article 9 outlines the guiding principles of foreign policy, including non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, abstention from military alliances, and fostering peaceful, mutually beneficial relations.

Additionally, Turkmenistan's neutrality is supported by the Constitutional Law on Permanent Neutrality, adopted in 1995. These legal frameworks do not just affirm the permanent nature of the policy but also serve as a vision for a more peaceful and prosperous world, setting an example for other nations to follow.

## GLOBAL GOVERNANCE THROUGH COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Turkmenistan's neutrality is also an instrument for promoting peaceful cooperation across borders. The country hosts numerous international events, festivals, and conferences, leveraging these platforms to foster dialogue and collaboration among nations. As a significant global energy player with vast hydrocarbon reserves, Turkmenistan contributes to regional and global energy security. Its efforts in developing energy infrastructure have far-reaching positive impacts on the economic development of Central Asia and beyond.

Considering that Turkmenistan is geographically located at the crossroads of North-South and West-East routes, the development of transport infrastructure is one of the priorities of Turkmenistan's state policy. Turkmenistan has put forward important initiatives, in particular, concerning the formation of international transit and transport corridors that provide optimal cost-effective routes for cargo transportation, including along the Caspian Sea-Black Sea route.

A successful result of joint efforts between Turkmenistan and Romania undertaken in the field of diversification of transport and transit routes between Asia and Europe was the quadrilateral meeting of the heads of the foreign ministries of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania on March 4, 2019 in Bucharest on the project to create an international transport corridor "Caspian Sea - Black Sea", which culminated in the adoption of the Bucharest Declaration by the participants. Diversification of cooperation in the direction "East-West" will significantly increase not only the volume of cargo transportation to Europe, but will also expand the possibilities of cooperation in the implementation of projects for the supply of Turkmen energy resources to the European market.

## LOOKING AHEAD: TURKMENISTAN'S CONTINUING ROLE IN GLOBAL PEACE

Turkmenistan's neutral policy is not only about peace but also about creating platforms for collaboration on global challenges. Our nation has established a fruitful partnership with countries like Austria and Switzerland, working together within international organizations to promote the principles of neutrality. The establishment of the Group of Friends of Neutrality for Peace and Security at the United Nations is one such initiative that underscores Turkmenistan's commitment to fostering global peace.

On March 21, 2024, at the 63rd plenary meeting of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly, at the initiative of Turkmenistan, the Resolution "2025 – International Year of Peace and Trust" was adopted, which aims to mobilize international efforts for building sustainable peace through dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. This resolution highlights Turkmenistan's belief in the power of neutrality to resolve conflicts and promote international cooperation.

As Turkmenistan approaches the 30th anniversary of its permanent neutrality, the country remains committed to strengthening the global culture of peace and trust. The upcoming Forum on Neutrality, scheduled for December 12, 2025, in Ashgabat, will offer an opportunity for the international community to explore the potential of neutrality as a powerful instrument for fostering global peace.

## CONCLUSION

Turkmenistan's unique approach to neutrality, grounded in its Constitution and international law, offers an inspiring model for peaceful influence in the 21st century. The country's neutral status is not just a foreign policy choice but a profound contribution to international peace, cooperation, and sustainable development. As Turkmenistan continues to expand its diplomatic efforts and foster collaboration with other nations, its neutrality stands as a beacon of hope for a more peaceful and interconnected world.

# KOREA AND ROMANIA: FROM AID RECIPIENTS TO STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTORS – THE TIME HAS COME TO RESPONSIBLY REINVEST THE SUPPORT ONCE GRANTED TO US

**Rim Kap-soo**

**ABSTRACT:** *This article explores the parallel developmental trajectories of South Korea and Romania, both having transitioned from significant aid recipients to active international donors. It details South Korea's "Miracle of the Han River" and its expanding Official Development Assistance (ODA) contributions, alongside Romania's economic transformation and institutional reforms facilitated by international support. The text advocates for enhanced bilateral development cooperation, leveraging South Korea's expertise in rapid economic growth and Romania's insights into European integration processes. Ultimately, it proposes a joint commitment to strengthening the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), aiming to responsibly reinvest past international generosity.*

**KEYWORDS:** *South Korea; Romania; development cooperation; international aid*

## THE SOUTH KOREAN SUCCESS STORY: A DEVELOPMENTAL NARRATIVE SURPASSING EVEN THE MOST COMPELLING WORKS OF FICTION

Recently, the Korean drama series *When Life Gives You Tangerines (original title: 폭싹 속았수다)* gained tremendous popularity worldwide. It topped the global charts as the no. 1 non-English series on Netflix and ranked in the Top 10 across more than 40 countries, including Romania. This drama spans six decades of the Korean history, from the 1960s to the present day. It resonated with many viewers by portraying the enduring sacrifices of a generation of Korean parents (or grandparents) who, despite the poverty and hardship that followed the Korean War, longed for a better life for their children. The story, filled with deep emotion and tears, struck a universal chord.

Indeed, Korea's dramatic economic and social transformation over the past six decades has provided rich material for countless films and television series. It is no exaggeration to say that this success story of Korea is itself more dramatic than any scripted fiction. In the aftermath of the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, the country was left in ruins. In 1953, Korea's per capita Gross National Income (GNI) was just USD 67. Today, in 2025, it exceeds USD 36,000. This extraordinary transformation is often referred to as the "Miracle of the Han River," a phrase that captures the astonishment with which the world has watched Korea's rapid rise.

Of course, the driving force behind this remarkable success was the dedication, hard work, and resilience of the Korean people, reinforced with the Korean government's strategy for economic and industrial development by focusing on heavy industries and cutting-edge technologies. However, it must also be acknowledged that assistance from the international community played a crucial role in enabling all this progress. Until the 1990s, Korea received an estimated USD 12 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 2010, Korea became the first country in history to join the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) after having once been an aid recipient, making a complete transition to donor status.

Korea has never forgotten the help it once received. With a deep sense of gratitude, Korea is now striving to fulfill its responsibilities as a member of the international community, making meaningful contributions that reflect Korea's strengthened position economically and politically in the global arena.

## SOUTH KOREA'S OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA) POLICY: ENDEAVORS TO REINVEST THE ASSISTANCE ONCE EXTENDED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The Korean government is pursuing an expansion of its Official Development Assistance (ODA) in line with its elevated global economic status as one of the world's top ten economies. In 2023 alone, Korea's total ODA reached USD 3.16 billion, ranking 14th among the 31 member countries of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). This marked a 12.5% increase from the previous year's USD 2.81 billion.

However, Korea's efforts go beyond simply increasing the volume of aid. The government is actively working to enhance the effectiveness of development cooperation by refining institutional frameworks for both concessional and grant-based assistance. In addition, Korea is formulating regional strategies and implementing tailored ODA programs for partner regions such as Africa, ASEAN, Latin America, and Central Asia. In June 2023, Korea successfully hosted the first-ever Korea-Africa Summit, under the theme "The Future We Make Together: Shared Growth, Sustainability, and Solidarity". This Summit marked a new chapter in Korea's efforts to build mutually beneficial partnerships with emerging regions.

Korea is also proactively addressing global challenges such as climate change, digitalization, and artificial intelligence through its ODA programs. To support global climate finance, Korea has pledged USD 300 million to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for the 2024-2027 period and is contributing KRW 6 billion (approximately USD 4.2 million) annually for the 2022–2026 period to the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) trust fund. Korea has also taken a leading role in the digital and artificial intelligence field. In May 2023, Korea hosted the AI Seoul Summit, which proposed a governance framework for artificial intelligence based on three key pillars: safety, innovation, and inclusion. Further, in September 2024, Korea hosted the Responsible AI in the Military Domain Summit (REAIM Summit 2024) and led the adoption of the *Blueprint for Action*, reinforcing its commitment to shaping global standards in emerging technologies.

Korea is also expanding its development cooperation through multilateral and bilateral frameworks, including the Korea-EU Policy Consultation on Development Cooperation. In particular, Korea is actively contributing to international efforts for the reconstruction of Ukraine. In 2023, Korea announced the *Ukraine Peace and Solidarity* Initiative and has since continued to participate in the Ukraine Donor Platform. At the recent NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting, H.E. Cho Tae-yul, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea, pledged an additional USD 100 million in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine for 2024, following a USD 200 million contribution in 2023. He also announced that Korea will provide USD 2 billion over the next five years (2025–2029) through the Korean Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) to support Ukraine's reconstruction.

## ROMANIA'S DEVELOPMENT TRAJECTORY: TRANSITIONING FROM AID BENEFICIARY TO INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTOR

At this point, I would like to highlight a significant and meaningful commonality between Korea and Romania: both countries have successfully transitioned from aid recipients to donor countries. In the 2000s, Romania recorded high economic growth rates, and its per capita GDP, which remained below USD 2,000 in the 1990s, has now surpassed USD 18,000. This dramatic economic transformation demonstrates Romania's impressive progress over the past few decades.

Similar to Korea's experience, the progress of Romania's development cannot be understood in isolation from global partnerships and external assistance. From the 1990s through the early 2000s, Romania benefited from a range of ODA and concessional loans provided by various donor countries. Korea also played a part in supporting Romania's development. Through the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Korea carried out the ODA projects including support for medical equipments and construction of local health clinics, and technical assistance in ship design. Furthermore, under the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF), Korea supported Romania in modernizing its telecommunications network, laying the foundation for digital infrastructure development.

Romania successfully transformed from a recipient country into a donor country in a short period of time, thanks to its institutional reforms aimed at European Union accession, proactive efforts to attract foreign investment, and the support of the international community. In 2017, Romania established the Romanian International Development Cooperation Agency (ROAID) operating under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This marked a turning point in Romania's development policy, shifting from one-time assistance to a more institutionalized, long-term, and effective approach to its international development cooperation. Since becoming a donor, Romania has prioritized the development of countries in its immediate neighborhood. From 2007 to 2011, it designated Serbia, Moldova, and Georgia as *Priority Countries* for its development cooperation. Today, Romania has expanded its strategic focus to include the extended Black Sea region, the Western Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East, reflecting its evolving geopolitical priorities and growing capacity as a donor.

According to the OECD, in 2021, the total value of official development assistance provided by Romanian public institutions reached USD 417.26 million (EUR 352.8 million), which is an increase of 35% compared to 2020. This figure is part of a consistent upward trend in Romania's aid contributions over recent years and reflects the depth of Romania's commitment to its support for developing countries. It also demonstrates Romania's efforts to align itself with the international donor community, strengthening its position as a serious and responsible development partner. At the same time, Romania is actively engaging in OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as a participant country, with redoubling its international development cooperation efforts which aim to meet the criteria and standards of the DAC.

## KOREA-ROMANIA COOPERATION: LEVERAGING POTENTIAL TO ESTABLISH A JOINT DEVELOPMENT EFFORT

This year, 2025, marks the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Korea and Romania. Since the establishment of our diplomatic relations on March 30, 1990, our two countries have steadily deepened cooperation across a range of fields. In 2008, Korea became Romania's first Asian strategic partner, and since then, bilateral collaboration has expanded into strategic areas such as defense, nuclear energy, and infrastructure. I am confident that we will continue to build on these foundations to yield practical and tangible outcomes, further solidifying our partnership as essential and irreplaceable.

Reflecting on the shared success stories of Korea and Romania, each having transitioned from recipients of international aid to proactive contributors, I would like to suggest that development cooperation also be considered as one of the meaningful and promising areas for future collaboration. In 2018, ROAID and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), followed in 2019 by an MOU between ROAID and the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF). These agreements have laid the groundwork for future cooperation based on each country's respective strengths and experiences.

Both Korea and Romania possess valuable development experiences to share. Korea, having experienced rapid economic development, has implemented the Knowledge Sharing Program (KSP) since 2004. This program draws on Korea's own developmental trajectory to provide partner countries with tailored policy advice that reflects both technical expertise and practical application.

Romania, for its part, brings to the table equally meaningful lessons. Its journey towards economic development and EU accession has involved important institutional reforms and democratic consolidation. According to Romania's *Multiannual Strategic Program of International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance 2024–2027*, Romania can make substantial contributions to countries in the extended Black Sea region and the Western Balkans that are striving for European integration. These contributions may include support in areas such as strengthening the rule of law and judicial systems, preventing and combating organized crime, developing and integrating anti-corruption policies into national legal frameworks. Moreover, Romania can provide, by transfer of expertise, assistance for activities aimed at economic development, such as streamlining and modernizing tax system, improving economic and commercial regulations, encouraging entrepreneurship, and enhancing transparency in public procurement. These are all areas where Romania has direct, practical experience, making its role as a development partner both credible and valuable.

In addition to sharing knowledge and policy expertise, Korea and Romania can actively cooperate to promote and strengthen the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC).

In 2011, Korea hosted the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4) in Busan. This historic Forum resulted in the adoption of the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*, a landmark document that emphasized the importance of inclusive and multi-stakeholder partnerships. It was the first time in the history of development cooperation that all actors, including emerging donors, recipient countries, civil society, and the private sector, agreed on common principles for more effective cooperation. This initiative fundamentally shifted the paradigm from a narrow focus on "aid effectiveness," centered around traditional donor-recipient relationships, to a more inclusive concept of "development effectiveness," which better reflects the complexity of today's global development landscape.

In 2012, the GPEDC was officially launched as a follow-up platform to monitor and advance the implementation of the commitments made in Busan. Since 2014, Korea has hosted the *Busan Global Partnership Forum* biennially to promote the GPEDC, and the 8th Forum is scheduled to take place from September 30 to October 1 this year in Seoul. Korea is looking forward to the participation of various development cooperation actors in the Forum, and the involvement of "emerging donors", such as Romania, is particularly essential for its success.

Given the current global context, marked by overlapping crises, climate change, conflicts, and developmental setbacks, the international community faces increasing difficulties in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is clear that no single country can address these challenges alone. Strengthening cooperation with "emerging donors" like Romania is more important than ever. Romania's relatively recent transition to donor status in 2007 places it in a unique position to understand both the aspirations of partner countries and the responsibilities of the donor community.

Together, Korea and Romania can contribute to shaping the future of development cooperation through a shared focus on locally led development, meaningful civil society participation, private sector engagement for sustainable growth, South-South cooperation, and effective field-level partnerships. Romania's commitment to these values, alongside Korea's experience and networks, could make our two nations influential and responsible actors in shaping the discourse on development cooperation effectiveness and leading the GPEDC.

To conclude, although Korea and Romania are geographically distant, our two countries have every reason to become faithful friends. We share many cultural, historical, and societal similarities. Most notably, we both have achieved remarkable economic growth and democratic development within a short period of time. These accomplishments were made possible not only by the determination and efforts of our peoples but also with the support of the international community.

Now, as countries that have been recipients of global generosity, it is our turn to "give back" what we owed in a manner that is commensurate with our status and capabilities. I believe our partnership will continue to shine and grow in significance, reflecting our shared commitment and potential.

# BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN ROMANIA AND AZERBAIJAN AS A BRIDGE FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE EXTENDED BLACK SEA AREA

**Fariz Ismailzade**

**ABSTRACT:** *This article explores the bilateral relations between Romania and Azerbaijan, positioning them as a bridge for regional integration in the extended Black Sea area. Since the proclamation of the independence of Azerbaijan, strong diplomatic bilateral ties led to 58 intergovernmental agreements, including a strategic partnership in 2009. All these make Romania the first EU nation to entertain relations at such level with Azerbaijan. Cooperation deepened across trade, energy, and transport, evidenced by rising trade volumes and the 2022 "Agreement on Strategic Partnership in Green Energy Development and Transmission". Romania supports Azerbaijan within the Euro-Atlantic organizations and offers a model for EU/NATO integration. These relations foster enhanced EU-Turkic world cooperation and crucial connectivity between Europe and Asia.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Romania-Azerbaijan relations; strategic partnership; Black Sea region; regional integration*

## BILATERAL RELATIONS

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the former Soviet republics, as well as the fall of the socialist system in Eastern Europe, have opened new and vast opportunities for regional development between newly formed states.

Romania and Azerbaijan were fast enough to recognize each other's independence, establish diplomatic relations, open embassies in the respective capitals, and begin to focus on the development of mutually beneficial political, economic and humanitarian ties. High level visits by the Presidents, Prime Ministers, Chairs of the Parliament and members of the Cabinet of Ministers as well as NGOs, academicians, media representatives and youth organizations have also taken place on a regular basis. By 2020, the two nations had signed a total of 58 intergovernmental agreements, including one on strategic partnership in 2009. In this respect, Romania became the first EU nation to sign such an agreement with Azerbaijan. These agreements have helped to deepen the cooperation in the fields of trade, investments, energy, transport, IT, agriculture, and connectivity.

As a result, the trade turnover between Romania and Azerbaijan increased steadily. Azerbaijani exports to Romania rose to US$ 476.87 million during 2024, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Romanian exports to Azerbaijan in 2023 reached 43 million USD.

In 2023, the top exports from Azerbaijan to Romania were crude petroleum ($273M), petroleum gas ($171M), and nitrogenous fertilizers ($37.4M). On the other hand, the top exports from Romania to Azerbaijan were refined petroleum ($10.9M), hair products ($5.88M), and packaged medicines ($2.91M).

There are around sixty books covering the literary works of eminent writers and dramatists from both nations to have been translated to both Romanian and Azerbaijani languages under the initiative of the Romania-Azerbaijan Friendship Association and with the support of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Romania. A bust of the national leader Haydar Aliyev was erected in Bucharest and a statue of the great Romanian composer George Enescu was erected in Baku. Currently, 44 fuel stations of the SOCAR brand are operating in Romania. Several Azerbaijani universities have engaged with Romanian universities in student/faculty exchange programs and research collaboration. Tourism has been on the rise between the two countries.

During the historic visit of President Aliyev to Romania in 2022, the "Agreement on Strategic Partnership in Green Energy Development and Transmission" was signed among Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary. Following this, Romania's electric grid operator "Transelectrica" signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Azerbaijan's "Azerenergy" OJSC, "Georgia State Electricity Network" and with Hungary's MVM company on the creation of a joint venture dedicated to green energy, centrally located in Romania.

## REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Cooperation between Romania and Azerbaijan extends beyond bilateral relations to encompass collaboration within broader regional frameworks. Both countries are members of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, OSCE, Council of Europe and other Euro-Atlantic organizations. Within these organizations, they cooperate with other regional actors to develop energy security, trade, investment and economic projects, transportation corridors and other focus areas.

Romania, having successfully completed the accession to both the European Union and NATO often serves as a supporting country within these important institutions for Azerbaijani foreign policy. Both countries have cooperated within the extension programs of these organizations, such as NATO Partnership for Peace and EU Eastern Partnership program. Romania has supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within these above-mentioned platforms and organizations and has advocated for the peace in the South Caucasus. Some analysts have claimed that Romania can serve as a role model for South Caucasus countries on the issue of integration with EU and NATO. Romania can also help build the capacity of these countries when it comes to the legislative reforms and understanding of EU rules and regulations.

During the early planning of the Southern Gas Corridor, some analysts and pundits have advocated for the construction of the gas pipeline from Azerbaijan to Europe via Romania, instead of Türkiye. This project even received a symbolic name: White Stream. It was widely supported by several countries and feasibility studies were conducted at the expense of EU member states. European Commission has also labelled the project as a priority and the Ukrainian government supported the extension of this pipeline to Crimea.

Eventually, the government of Azerbaijan decided to push for the pipeline going through the territory of Türkiye and further onwards to Greece, Albania, and Italy. Yet, the White Stream project showed the potential of Romania to be the critical transit country for the Caspian energy resources towards the European markets.

In fact, this same idea and route are currently being proposed by the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary for the export of green energy from the Caspian basin area towards EU region. The four respective governments have agreed on this project, which will derive solar and wind energy from Azerbaijan's newly signed projects with UAE company *Masdar* and Saudi Arabian company *Aquapower*. At the same time, Azerbaijan hopes to tap into clean electricity from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, within the newly signed trilateral agreement on transcaspian green energy corridor.

The war in Ukraine has shown once again the importance of the middle corridor in Eurasia to connect EU member states with China and Central Asia. The trade volumes via Azerbaijan have been steadily rising in the past years thanks to the construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the development of the Alat port, and of the free economic zone in the south of Baku. These are connectivity projects with Central Asia and China within the broader One Belt-One Road project. As EU wants to develop further trade ties with China, the role of Romania and Azerbaijan as connectivity bridges between two continents will further increase.

## PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE COOPERATION

The election of President Trump in the USA and the subsequent tectonic changes in the international politics open both risks and opportunities for the European security. For more than 80 years, Europe has been dependent on the USA for its hard, military security. NATO has been the guarantor of the European stability and the EU has been a dominant force for the economic development and integration. Under current realities, when both NATO and the EU are under attack, Romania and other members of the EU should and will look for other regional partners for security, cooperation, and development.

The Turkic world and, more specifically, the role of Türkiye and Azerbaijan will significantly grow in these new realities. Both countries have a good record of cooperation with European nations on matters such as migration, hard security, terrorism prevention, transit coordinators, energy issues, and connectivity with China and Central Asia.

As Washington decreases its support to and role in European security, EU members can deepen cooperation with the countries of Central Asia and Caucasus, as it was recently demonstrated by the joint summit of EU leaders and Central Asian chiefs of states. Progress in this direction would allow the EU to better connect to Central Asia and China on economic, trade and transit issues, to create a more aligned policy with regional governments on the matters of migration, knowledge and technology transfer, democratic reforms, modernization and prevention of radicalism, terrorism, and extremism.

Thus, Azerbaijan-Romanian relations can be an example and the backbone for this cooperation. In the past years, Hungary has been the forefront of the EU-Turkic world cooperation. Many inside the EU have even blamed the Hungarian leadership for this. Yet, time has shown that Hungary's outreach to the Turkic world has provided significant political, economic, and trade advantages for the Hungarian state. Romania can similarly deepen cooperation with the regional powers and thus serve as a bridge between the EU and China via Caucasus and Central Asia.

Regional security in the wider Black Sea area will much depend on the outcome of the Ukraine-Russia war and the subsequent provisions of the peace agreement, which will determine the borders and spheres of influence in the region. Romania and Azerbaijan, alongside with Türkiye, can play an important role in the reconstruction of the Ukrainian lands, as well as in the restoration of peace, trust, and confidence in the region. They can also jointly support the developments in the Republic of Moldova, the stability and prosperity of this country being important for the sovereignty of both Romania and Azerbaijan. These countries have voiced strong support for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova.

## CONCLUSION

Enormous opportunities exist in the bilateral and multilateral tracks of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Romania, especially in the humanitarian field, where Romanian companies and organizations can share their experience with Azerbaijan and develop joint investment projects.

The Azerbaijani nation looks towards Romania with optimism and trust and, most importantly, believes that Romanian society better understands the challenges of transition and development in the post-Soviet space, and can help the countries in that space to better develop and prepare for the future.

# THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY IN FACILITATING A BALANCED DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE STATES OF THE GLOBAL NORTH AND SOUTH

**Oleksandra Sologub**

**ABSTRACT:** *This article explores the pivotal role of economic diplomacy in fostering a balanced dialogue between the Global North and South, aiming to bridge economic imbalances. It emphasizes economic diplomacy's function across trade negotiations, foreign direct investment attraction, and technology transfer, recognizing these as crucial for developing countries' growth and global market participation. The text highlights successful initiatives, including the ASEAN-EU partnership, China's Belt and Road Initiative, and the application of digital tools like Ukraine's Nazovni platform to facilitate international trade and investment. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of economic diplomacy in advancing sustainable development and addressing global challenges like climate change.*

**KEYWORDS:** *economic diplomacy; Global North and South; sustainable development*

## INTRODUCTION

Economic diplomacy has become a key tool in promoting an equitable dialogue between the Global North and the Global South. Although the terms "Global North" and "Global South" are quite outdated according to some authors. It must therefore be mentioned that, although not all scholars support such a division given the fast global changes, we will still use it for a better understanding of the impact of economic diplomacy on relations between different countries in the context of this terminology.

As globalization deepens interdependencies between countries, economic diplomacy offers a structured approach to negotiations, trade agreements, and investment strategies that can overcome economic imbalances. It serves as a channel to bridge these differences, promote cooperation, and ensure that the voices of all countries are heard on the world stage.

The article examines the relevance of economic diplomacy as a tool for achieving a balanced economic dialogue, highlights its role in trade negotiations, investment policy, sustainable development, and conflict resolution. It also examines the challenges and prospects of using economic diplomacy to bridge the gap between North and South, as well as provides a practical approach and examples using up-to-date technologies.

## BRIEF INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

Economic diplomacy is the use of public resources to promote the growth of a country's economy by increasing trade, promoting investment, fostering cooperation on bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

Economic diplomacy includes the use of economic instruments, policies and negotiations to achieve national and international goals, as well as a wide range of measures such as trade agreements, investment treaties, financial assistance, and development cooperation. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which primarily focuses on political relations, economic diplomacy focuses on economic growth, stability, and cooperation both within the country and reflecting world relations.

In the context of North-South relations, economic diplomacy serves as a platform for addressing issues such as trade imbalances, foreign direct investment flows, debt relief, and access to technology, followed by climate change issues and new emphasis on the world order. Developed countries representing the Global North often have a significant influence on international economic governance, while developing countries in the Global South strive for equal opportunities for growth and participation in global markets. In these rapidly changing times, the countries of the Global South are seen as the vanguard of a changing order; those who will set the agenda and lead the formation of a more representative and responsible world.

**The role of economic diplomacy in the North-South dialogue is, in our opinion, the most important in several areas that we propose to consider, namely: trade, investment, and technology transfer.**

### 1. Negotiations and trade agreements

The fundamental function of economic diplomacy is the development of economic cooperation, the market liberalization, and the promotion of trade negotiations aimed at ensuring fair market access. Historically, trade agreements have often favored developed countries, leading to imbalances in world trade. Currently, economic diplomacy allows developing countries to negotiate more favorable terms, reduce tariffs and provide preferential access to northern markets.

An example of successful agreements and cooperation between the South and the North is the partnership between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU). Launched in 1977, this dialogue has developed, resulting in the EU becoming ASEAN's largest investor and second largest trading partner. Furthermore, agreements such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and preferential trade programs such as the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), where special arrangements have been created to meet the special needs of least developed countries, provide developing countries with better export opportunities. Through diplomatic and trade exchanges based on collective but differentiated commitments, the EU and ASEAN can transform complex economies through complementary goals and mutually beneficial goals. Economic diplomacy also plays a key role in reforming the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to ensure that they take into account the interests of the Global South.

Trade agreements today increasingly consider not only economic but also social and environmental considerations. The European Union's trade agreements with countries such as Japan and Canada include provisions on sustainable development, labour rights and environmental protection. This recent trend highlights the importance of aligning economic interests with broader global challenges. In addition, the shift towards multipolarity in the global order raises questions about the impact of emerging economies such as India and Brazil on global economic governance. These countries are likely to play a more prominent role in shaping future trade agreements and stimulating discussions on economic diplomacy.

Economic diplomacy serves as an important tool for negotiations, finding new markets, exporting goods to the markets of partner countries, opening new markets owing to trade agreements, and generally building a strategy for the development of foreign economic activity. In today's world, we can see a very close connection between globalization and economic diplomacy. As Hala H. ElSaid Younes, Minister of Planning and Economic Development in Egypt, noted: "International trade and globalization are the main drivers of inclusive economic growth".

"As members of the Global South, we would like and request the Global North and the players who have so much power… do not close the channels of diplomacy. Open channels of communication" – M.U.M. Ali Sabry, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka.

Foreign direct investment is the most important driver of economic growth in developing countries. Economic diplomacy plays an important role in creating a favorable investment climate, attracting capital, and concluding agreements that protect the interests of investors. While the Global North is often the main source of investment, economic diplomacy must ensure that these investments are in line with the development priorities of host countries. Bilateral investment treaties are becoming increasingly popular as a means of encouraging foreign direct investment from Global North to Global South countries.

Today, attracting investments is one of the key tasks of diplomats. Foreign direct investment is the most dynamic form of international economic relations and an important goal of economic diplomacy. Through economic diplomacy, efforts are directed toward attracting investments, supported by government programs aimed at fostering investor interest. Favorable conditions are created for investors, recognizing that investment attraction is closely tied to the broader development of the state, including key economic sectors and the business environment; by strengthening these areas, the country enhances its overall appeal to potential investors.

The countries of the South began to play an important role in international financial investments, and not only as holders of bank deposits and reserves in the North. For example, China has become an important creditor in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and the yuan has become more widely used. China's Belt and Road Initiative (a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013 to invest in nearly 70 countries and international organizations) has transformed economic interactions between North and South by providing infrastructure investment in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The plan aims to achieve trade and investment growth through infrastructure connectivity that will benefit Asia, Oceania, Europe, and Africa. The Gulf countries, for instance, have recycled some of the petrodollars by investing in other emerging markets and developing economies.

When it comes to attracting investment, one cannot ignore the examples of countries like India and Saudi Arabia. Outpacing any of the current super economies, India has become a leader among the world's fastest-growing major economies. It is expected to become the third largest economy by 2032. The maturity of capital markets promotes future investment opportunities and ensures sustainable and diversified economic development. The development of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) complements India's efforts to expand international trade by opening new business channels. Saudi Arabia, for instance, launched the "Vision 2030" strategy, where diversification into new sectors, infrastructure development, health and education are the most important pillars of this strategy, and private sector investment has increased significantly, supporting the Kingdom's diversification efforts.

Large companies operating in these sectors play a significant role in attracting investments, highlighting the critical importance of business development. This dynamic is reinforced by economic diplomacy, which actively promotes investment opportunities in the respective areas.

Having analyzed national and international publications, as well as speeches of politicians from Africa and Asia, we can conclude that the countries of the Global South need partnership with the countries of the Global North and the tool for achieving such interaction is economic diplomacy, which contributes to maintaining a constant dialogue between all players. Therefore, diplomats have an important communication function, informing stakeholders about the challenges facing their countries in order to identify and prepare investment projects that are eligible for financing and to seek assistance from development partners and external investment agencies.

**2. Technology transfer and knowledge sharing**

An important aspect of economic diplomacy is the promotion of technology transfer and knowledge-sharing agreements. The digital divide between the North and the South remains a key issue, as modern challenges related to the development of technology, the Internet, and the development of artificial intelligence add to the limitations of the ability of developing countries to compete in high-value industries. Economic diplomacy emphasizes partnerships that promote technology transfer and knowledge sharing, enabling countries in the Global South to strengthen their technological capabilities and integrate into global value chains.

Also, the importance of data sharing for trade is well recognized. Data-driven insights can play a significant role in soft diplomacy, which focuses on building relationships and trust between nations. By sharing data on trade, economic indicators, and market trends, countries can foster economic cooperation and enhance bilateral relations. Cooperation and exchange of resources will allow the Global South to negotiate collectively with the Global North, leading to more balanced and equitable diplomatic outcomes.

### 3. The role of economic diplomacy in advancing sustainable development

Sustainable development has become a central topic in economic diplomacy, especially on climate change, the clean energy transition, and green finance. We can see, that in this respect diplomacy and sustainable development have always been linked. Developing countries often bear the brunt of the effects of climate change, despite the fact that they make minimal contributions to global emissions. Economic diplomacy promotes cooperation between North and South in securing climate finance, promoting technology transfer for renewable energies, and building capacity for sustainable development.

There is an increasing recognition of the direct influence that climate change has on economic development. Sustainable development is a paradigm of scientific thinking about the balance of environmental, economic, and social needs for the present and for the future. The UN 2030 Programme of 17 Sustainable Development Goals has defined a unique, comprehensive, and long-term strategy for global democratization. The Sustainable Development Goals are a joint plan to support countries in their quest to combine economic growth and sustainability. The goals and objectives of sustainable development are interrelated, interdependent, universal, indivisible, and integrated. Recognizing these characteristics is crucial for the successful implementation of the sustainable development framework. Until now, many Global South countries lack basic infrastructure, including roads, information and communication technologies, sanitation, electricity and water supply. For example, 6% of the world's population does not have access to mobile communications. For African countries, the lack of infrastructure reduces the productivity of enterprises by 40%.

Economic diplomacy is focused on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which solve problems related to economic growth, optimization of production and consumption, development of green energy, and infrastructure.

### A PRACTICAL APPROACH THROUGH THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

In analyzing the role of economic diplomacy, it is important to highlight the concept of commercial diplomacy, which usually is regarded as a subset of economic diplomacy. Commercial diplomacy is characterized by its focus on promoting domestic businesses and the financial sector to bolster the national economy, as well as by its role in facilitating investment attraction. As an example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine uses a digital tool (the Nazovni platform) to promote domestic goods and services abroad, which involves all national economic diplomats in foreign diplomatic missions in more than 120 countries.

This service was established at the end of 2021, with the informational and institutional support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, and is designed to promote the interests of domestic producers of goods and services within the framework of implementing national, regional, local, and international economic projects/programs. It aims to assist Ukrainian exporters in entering foreign markets and expanding business connections, as well as in ensuring the protection of their rights and legitimate interests abroad.

The service also provides ongoing informational support to familiarize representatives of Ukrainian businesses with the rules of operating in international markets. It creates a favorable external environment for the practical resolution of economic cooperation tasks between Ukrainian producers and foreign counterparts, enhances the competitiveness of Ukrainian producers, and improves conditions for Ukrainian producers' access to foreign markets.

The primary focus of the Nazovni Platform, as a service, is the systematic administration of relations in the cooperation between Ukrainian exporters and economic diplomats. The services provided by the platform include the search for potential counterparties, obtaining favorable conditions for participation in trade fairs and exhibitions, analysis of spheres and industries, and other opportunities to sustain businesses, and expand the scope of services in demand in foreign markets. It promotes the national brand of Ukraine in the global market by assisting and facilitating participation in international exhibitions and retail events and building trust in state support among domestic exporters.

To date, there are over 2,500 registered companies (verified potential exporters) on the platform, more than 12,000 export applications, over 1,000 market search requests, and, with over 500 export contracts signed, this initiative has provided a significant boost to the national economy and strong support to the business sector. Through these efforts, national exporters have established cooperative relationships with partners across Africa, Asia, and Europe. This serves as a practical example of economic diplomacy in action, demonstrating its role in trade development and investment attraction.

## INSIGHTS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the role of economic diplomacy in promoting an equal dialogue between the North and the South, the following strategies should be considered:

**1. Strengthening of multilateral institutions**

Reforming global economic institutions to provide greater representation and decision-making power for developing countries is crucial. This includes reviewing voting rights in the IMF and the World Bank, as well as ensuring fair trade mechanisms within the WTO.

**2. Facilitating the development of fair and inclusive trade agreements accessible to all states**

Trade agreements should include social and environmental provisions that protect labor rights, promote sustainable development, and ensure a fair distribution of value. Regional trading blocks in the Global South must strengthen their negotiating power through collective economic diplomacy.

**3. Fostering the adoption of responsible investment strategies**

Foreign investment agreements should include clear guidelines on labor standards, environmental protection, and technology transfer. Public-private partnerships can be used to align investments with national development goals.

**4. Enhancing collaboration among countries of the Global South**

Developing countries should strengthen economic cooperation among themselves through regional trade agreements, joint infrastructure projects and joint technological initiatives. Organizations such as BRICS and the African Union (AU) can play a significant role in this regard.

**5. Deepening North-South collaborative frameworks**

Establishing an equitable dialogue between North and South to enhance cooperation in trade, investment, and technology transfer, fostering a global partnership through financial support, fair market access, innovations, and diplomatic coordination. Strengthening trade unions and international economic associations to expand cooperation and drive sustainable growth.

**6. Advancing the strategic use of digital and green diplomacy**

Economic diplomacy should increasingly focus on cooperation in the field of the digital economy, including the regulation of e-commerce, the development of digital infrastructure, and cybersecurity policies. Similarly, green diplomacy should prioritize renewable energy investments and climate change adaptation strategies.

## CONCLUSION

Economic diplomacy is a key tool for building an equal and mutually beneficial dialogue between the Global North and the Global South. It plays a critical role in shaping fair trade relations, attracting investment, technology transfer, and promoting sustainable development. In today's world, where globalization has replaced traditional economic ties, it is economic diplomacy that helps the countries of the Global South overcome structural imbalances and gain access to new markets, financing, and innovation. The effectiveness of economic diplomacy is confirmed by specific successful cases, such as the partnership between ASEAN and the EU, the initiatives of the African Continental Free Trade Area, as well as China's role in international infrastructure projects. At the same time, the growing multipolarity of the global economy creates both new challenges and new opportunities for developing countries, including the need to strengthen their own positions in world trade, increase investment attractiveness, and develop strategic industries.

Technology transfer and innovation are also becoming important aspects of economic diplomacy, as they contribute to bridging the digital divide and integrating countries in the Global South into high-tech production chains. The use of digital platforms such as Ukrainian Nazovni demonstrates how modern technologies can increase the efficiency of the institution of economic diplomacy, providing quick access for businesses to international markets and facilitating the involvement of foreign partners.

Given contemporary global challenges, including climate change, economic diplomacy is becoming particularly significant as a mechanism for climate cooperation and the development of sustainable solutions. Owing to joint initiatives between North and South, it is possible to achieve a balance between economic growth and environmental responsibility, which is crucial for long-term development.

Thus, economic diplomacy remains a relevant tool for strengthening international economic cooperation and equalizing opportunities between the countries of the Global North and the Global South. Its further development will require adjustments to new global realities, the integration of digital technologies, and a strategic approach to the creation of mutually beneficial partnerships.

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# ASSESSING STATE CAPACITY POST-USAID IN CENTRAL AMERICA: THE CASE OF GUATEMALA, HONDURAS, AND COSTA RICA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Facing drastic U.S. foreign aid cuts in 2025, including the termination of USAID, this research assesses the impact on state capacity in Central America, focusing on Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica. It investigates how the withdrawal of governance funding affects state capacity in the region. Utilizing frameworks of aid dependency and state capacity, complemented by historical-institutional analysis, the study argues that USAID's exit will probably influence nations in critical areas regarding governance, which had high pre-existing aid dependency and weaker institutions, namely Guatemala and Honduras. These cases reveal systemic vulnerabilities exacerbated by the funding shock. In contrast, Costa Rica, characterized by stronger state capacity and lower aid dependence, shows greater resilience. The findings underscore the critical link between international aid, endogenous state capacity, and deep-rooted institutional histories; highlighting the risks of external funding shocks for fragile states in the region, but with a minor incidence in stronger states of Central America.*

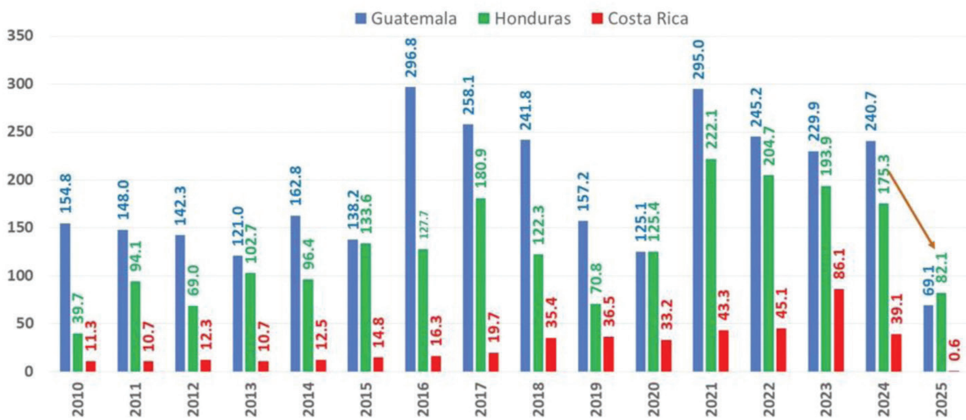
**KEYWORDS:** *state capacity; post-USAID; Central America; fragile states; aid dependency*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is implementing an ample cut of 84.1% to international aid in 2025 compared to 2024. The budget has decreased to US$ 8.9 billion in 2025, with respect to US$ 56 billion assigned in 2024. This quantity was already inferior to the US$ 79 billion in 2023, which is equivalent to a contraction of 29.1%. Foreign assistance was handled through different US government institutions. The main institution for 2024 was the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with 63.2% of all resources, followed by the State Department with 28.9% and the Millenium Challenge Corporation with 3%. These three institutions absorbed 95.2% of all the funds, directing them to support different critical areas of the corresponding nations, such as governance, health, education, economic growth, agriculture, infrastructure, humanitarian aid, etc.

This analysis focuses on the cooperation between north-south in the support of the governance sector by studying the cases of three developing nations in Central America: Guatemala, which was ranked fourth among countries that received aid from the United States in the Western hemisphere in 2024, Honduras, which was placed sixth, and Costa Rica, which was ranked sixteenth. Graph 1 illustrates how these nations have benefited from aid in the governance sector from the United States. The series presents the way funds had been increased for Guatemala and Honduras, while they remained stable for Costa Rica at the end of the Obama administration in 2016-2017. Trump's first administration reported a decrease in the funds directed to Guatemala and Honduras during 2019. Later, with the pandemic of 2019-2020 and the arrival of the Biden Administration in 2021, foreign assistance funds increased significantly for Guatemala and Honduras, while in a lesser manner to Costa Rica.

The second Trump Administration, under his "America First" government (The White House, 2025), implemented an important cut in all international aid that included the termination of USAID. According to the U.S. Foreign Assistance webpage, the aid for Guatemala was diminished by 71.3% in 2025, going from a budget of US$ 240.7 million in 2024 to US$ 69.1 million in 2025. Likewise, Honduras has a cut of 53.1% in 2025, going from US$ 175.3 million in 2024, to US$ 82.3 million in 2025. Costa Rica experienced a drastic 98.4% cut in aid, with funding plummeting from $39.1 million in 2024 to just $600 in 2025. The following graph illustrates the data from Foreign Assistance and the changes in funding over time (Foreign Assistance, 2025).




**Graph 1.** United States' financial aid from all agencies to Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica (US$ millions) (Foreign Assistance, 2025)

This abrupt withdrawal raises a critical question: How does the withdrawal of USAID governance funding affect state capacity in Central America? This study employs theoretical frameworks of aid dependency, state capacity (fiscal, administrative, and legitimacy), and historical institutionalism to analyze the impacts.

The central thesis argues that USAID's exit disproportionately destabilized countries with high governance-aid dependency (Honduras, Guatemala), revealing systemic vulnerabilities in state infrastructure, while less-dependent states (Costa Rica) exhibited resilience. The analysis contends that the consequences are mediated by pre-existing institutional strength and historical development paths. States like Guatemala and Honduras, with significant governance weaknesses and greater reliance on aid to subsidize core functions, are expected to experience more severe deterioration than Costa Rica, which possesses stronger institutions and a lower aid dependency.

This paper will proceed as follows: *Section 2* reviews the relevant literature on foreign aid, state capacity, and historical state formation in Latin America. *Section 3* provides a case example (MACCIH in Honduras) illustrating the complexities of external aid and state capacity. *Section 4* details the USAID funding landscape pre- and post-cut for Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica, juxtaposing funding data with governance indicators. Finally, the paper will offer conclusions on the different impacts of the aid withdrawal and recommendations for policymakers and future assistance models.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between foreign aid and governance capacity has been extensively theorized through two complementary lenses: the institutional impacts of aid dependency (Knack, 2000) and the state capacity framework (Di Maro et al., 2021). While Knack's analysis of African nations establishes foundational arguments about aid's dual potential to strengthen or weaken governance, Di Maro et al.'s empirical work on state capacity provides crucial insights into how institutional context mediates these effects - particularly relevant for understanding the potential consequences of USAID withdrawal in Central America.

Di Maro et al. (2021) conceptualize state capacity as comprising three interdependent components: fiscal capacity, administrative competence, and institutional legitimacy. This framework helps explain Knack's (2000) observed positive effects of aid. In Central America, USAID programs have ostensibly targeted all three dimensions:

• *Fiscal Capacity Building*

The World Bank's Tanzania study (Di Maro et al., 2021) demonstrates how performance-based grants can theoretically strengthen local revenue systems, though with mixed results. Aid often missed to account for pre-existing institutional weaknesses. Developing countries often lack basic characteristics of state capacity. Such characteristics are the ability to collect taxes destined to fund public services, enforce contracts, and protect property rights.

• *Administrative Capacity Development*

Technical assistance programs represent a second pathway for governance improvement. Di Maro et al. (2021) emphasize that effective administrative strengthening requires alignment with local institutional contexts. Projects sometimes struggle with isomorphic mimicry, where institutional forms were replicated without corresponding functionality or adapted to local contexts (Di Maro et al., 2021, 27).

• *Legitimacy and Citizen Engagement*

Both Knack (2000) and Di Maro et al. (2021) identify citizen-state relations as critical for sustainable governance. Endogenous trust-building processes are key to this (Di Maro et al, 2021, 6). This refers to improvements in state capacity that originate and evolve from within a country or society, rather than being driven by external aid or financial incentives. However, the historical key for state capacity building is in the hands of citizens' demands for public goods, and willingness to pay taxes to a state they consider legitimate.

The potential negative consequences of aid articulated by Knack (Knack, 2000), particularly fiscal substitution, institutional bypassing, and reform sustainability challenges, find troubling empirical validation in Central America when examined through state capacity framework (Di Maro et al., 2021). These dynamics reveal how external assistance can inadvertently undermine the very governance structures it seeks to strengthen, especially in contexts of preexisting institutional fragility.

Di Maro et al. (2021) emphasize that aid can disrupt the fiscal social contract by reducing incentives for domestic revenue mobilization. An example of this risk: during periods of direct budget support from international aid, the country's tax effort declines. This aligns with Knack's (2000) concern that aid dependency weakens governmental accountability to citizens, as rulers reliant on external funds face diminished pressure to cultivate broad-based tax compliance.

A second critical issue emerges in the realm of bureaucratic development. Di Maro et al.'s (2021, p. 13) Tanzanian case study demonstrates how donor projects often create parallel implementation structures that sideline state institutions. An example of this would be when international aid-funded NGOs reportedly attract skilled professionals away from public institutions. Such fragmentation risks perpetuating a dual governance system, one shaped by donor priorities rather than endogenous state capacity.

The sustainability of donor-supported reforms presents a further dilemma. Di Maro et al. (2021) argue that state capacity evolves through endogenous shifts in trust and legitimacy. If the state has no real interest, making these shifts on its own, aid for its development in collaboration with the state may not be sustainable. This can be better illustrated when political elites resist its anti-corruption mandates, the mechanism dissolves, leaving no durable institutional legacy. This underscores the limits of transplanting reforms without local ownership.

The interplay between aid's positive and negative effects ultimately hinges on preexisting state capacity, as highlighted by Di Maro et al.'s (2021) comparative framework. Central America's heterogeneous governance landscapes would thus respond differentially to reductions in US assistance:

- **Higher-capacity states** like Costa Rica, with a tax-to-GDP ratio of 25.5% in 2024 (OECD et al., 2024), with robust administrative and fiscal institutions, would likely absorb shocks with minimal disruption.
- **Fragile states** such as Honduras 21.4% (OECD et al., 2024) and Guatemala 14.4% (OECD et al., 2024), where USAID has subsidized core governance functions, face acute risks of regression. Particularly in the justice and security sectors dependent on external technical and financial support.

This analysis suggests that the consequences of diminished US engagement will be mediated by each country's position on Di Maro et al.'s state capacity spectrum. The most aid-dependent, low-capacity states may experience severe governance deterioration, reinforcing the need for assistance models that prioritize endogenous institutional resilience over short-term project outcomes.

The preceding analysis of foreign aid's paradoxical effects on governance capacity in Central America underscores a deeper institutional dilemma: Why are states in the region so structurally vulnerable to external shocks and aid dependency? This question necessitates a historical-institutional examination, as articulated by Mazzuca's work on *latecomer state formation* in Latin America (Mazzuca, 2021). His framework reveals that the region's governance weaknesses are not merely the product of recent policy failures but are entrenched in a 19th-century political order that prioritized territorial consolidation over bureaucratic development.

Mazzuca's central thesis distinguishes state formation, the monopolization of coercion within defined borders, from state capacity, the administrative ability to uniformly provide public goods. Latin America's divergence from the European model is striking: whereas geopolitical competition in early modern Europe necessitated both centralized coercion and bureaucratic transformation, Latin America's state formation was trade-led, lacking existential military threats. This "geopolitical bonus" allowed elites to prioritize commercial integration and short-term stability over institutional deepening. Revenue reliance on primary exports (tariffs rather than domestic taxation) enabled the preservation of local patrimonial networks, creating a governance model where oligarchic autonomy trumped centralized state capacity.

Nowhere is this dynamic more pronounced than in Central America, where the collapse of the Central American Federation (1823–1839) exemplified the region's trajectory of fragmentation and institutional underdevelopment. Fiscal scarcity and localist resistance fractured the Federation, as regional elites, exemplified by figures like Guatemala's Rafael Carrera, prioritized personalist rule over collective state-building. Ports, critical for customs revenue, remained under local control, and the marginal profitability of 19th-century exports rendered even basic federal governance unsustainable. This legacy of hyper fragmentation entrenched *lord-driven* governance, where weak central institutions coexisted with entrenched subnational patronage networks.

The implications for contemporary governance are profound. Central America's historical institutionalization of patrimonialism explains its persistent struggles with uneven service provision, "gray areas" of limited statehood, and presidential dominance, all of which exacerbate aid dependency. Mazzuca's concept of "strong antibodies against state capacity" clarifies why externally originated reforms often collapse when political incentives shift. The region's foundational bargain, exchanging centralized capacity for elite stability, created a path-dependent weakness that endures in its reliance on external aid and resistance to sustainable reform.

This historical analysis reframes Central America's governance challenges as path-dependent outcomes, not merely contemporary policy failures. The region's vulnerability to aid volatility and institutional fragility is, in essence, the modern manifestation of a centuries-old institutional order designed to resist centralized state capacity, a reality that demands reevaluating external assistance models to address these deep-rooted constraints.

## 3. EXAMPLE: HONDURAS AND MACCIH

A renowned public case that illustrates the lack of state capacity and the undermining of international funding is Honduras' Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity (MACCIH). This mission, which was operating within the context of systemic corruption and organized crime, led to the deformation and the capture of a Honduran state institution (Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos & Latinos de American University, 2018, 3). The mission was terminated as there was no renewal of its agreement, reflecting both the symptoms and consequences of democratic backsliding and the enormous lack of state capacity from Honduras.

Honduras' institutions that were designed to protect public goods, have usually been captured by entrenched power groups that serve their private interests rather than public welfare. The way these power groups have captured institutions has enabled the persistent plundering of public resources and has plagued even the highest political posts. International cases with judicial testimonies revealed drug trafficking networks involving senior military, police, and political leadership, illustrating the depth of state penetration by criminal structures (Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos & Latinos de American University, 2018, 9).

The massive social protests against corruption in 2015, known as "las antorchas", led to the emergence of MACCIH. This protest erupted after the revelation of $300 million embezzlement from Honduran Social Security Institute which were allegedly used to finance political campaigns (Navas Álvarez, 2020). The Organization of American States (OAS) and Honduras reached an agreement in April 2016 finally establishing the institution, receiving the support of the G-16 donor group and the U.S. Embassy (Navas Álvarez, 2020, 8). They recognized Honduras challenges with regard to poverty, violence, and migration. The mission counted with the newly created Special Prosecutor's Unit Against Impunity (UFECIC) within the Public Ministry and was staffed with international experts. During the operational period of MACCIH/UFECIC, the institution brought 14 cases to trial showcasing the systemic corruption mechanisms functioning in broad daylight (Navas Álvarez, 2020, 3). While citizens struggled, officials diverted public funds to private accounts and to political financing. Yet in 2020, due to the elite's consolidation of power, it was decided that there would not be a renewal of these institutions. The government even replaced the UFECIC with a domestic-only unit, which made more evident the re-instauration of political control over corruption efforts (Navas Álvarez, 2020, 8).

This case exemplifies the complicated relationship between international assistance and governance in fragile states. The mission did help compensate for Honduras' deficient institutional capacity, its external funding and mandate created dependencies vulnerable to geopolitical changes and domestic resistance. It was a clear example of how deeply entrenched corruption networks and historical patterns of state formation in Latin America, where states developed as patronage systems rather than public service providers, create persistent obstacles to anti-corruption methods. A sustainable reform needs endogenous political will and citizen engagement, and not only external support, as portrayed by MACCHI's legacy despite technical achievements.

## 4. USAID'S 2024 CONTRIBUTIONS

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established in 1961 through Executive Order 10973 under President John F. Kennedy, merging several preexisting U.S. foreign assistance programs, including the Marshall Plan (1948–1951) and the International Cooperation Administration (1955–1961) (Tarnoff, 2018). As the primary U.S. government agency for international development, USAID was created to administer economic and humanitarian assistance, with an initial focus on promoting modernization (Latham, 2011).

During its early decades, USAID's work in Latin America was closely tied to the Alliance for Progress (1961–1973), a regional initiative aimed at fostering economic growth, social reform, and democratic governance (Rabe, 1999). Over time, the agency's priorities shifted in response to changing geopolitical dynamics. In Central America, USAID has implemented programs across sectors such as governance, economic growth, health, and education, often in partnership with host governments and local organizations. While some evaluations highlight its contributions to infrastructure and institutional development, others note challenges related to sustainability, coordination with local actors, and the tension between development objectives and geopolitical priorities (Knack, 2000).

Since 2017, USAID has operated under the *Journey to Self-Reliance* policy framework, which prioritizes institutional capacity-building and the gradual reduction of aid dependency in partner countries (Runde et al., 2021). This approach reflects broader theoretical debates in development economics regarding the tension between short-term humanitarian assistance and long-term structural resilience, a central concern in contemporary foreign aid effectiveness literature.

However, this trajectory was disrupted in 2025 when the Trump administration issued its first Executive Order, freezing foreign assistance funding and mandating a comprehensive review of USAID's global operations (Debusmann, 2025). Subsequent efficiency measures led to the termination of approximately 82% of the agency's programs worldwide, with particular consequences for Central America. The funding cuts created significant challenges for recipient nations, especially in sectors where USAID had been a primary financier. Governance systems, which historically received the largest share of USAID allocations in the region, faced immediate destabilization, while public health systems lost access to essential medicines previously supplied through USAID-backed initiatives (Congressional Research Service, 2021). The impacts varied considerably across countries due to differing levels of institutional capacity and aid dependence.

For example:

- **Costa Rica**, with stronger domestic institutions, received no governance-sector funding, and its limited USAID allocations were supplementary rather than structural.
- **Honduras and Guatemala**, where USAID programs accounted for 12-18% of annual public institutional budgets (OECD, 2020), experienced acute contractions in judicial reform, anti-corruption efforts, and rural healthcare delivery.

In the following paragraphs, we will conduct a comparative analysis of pre- and post-2025 funding patterns, examining how the abrupt withdrawal will probably affect governance quality and public service provision across Central America's heterogeneous institutional landscapes.

### *A. GUATEMALA*

USAID Guatemala in 2024 granted $161,7 million, from which $50 million (31%) were destined to Governance programmes. Within the Category of "Governance", $11 million were destined to "Conflict, Peace and Security" initiatives. Meanwhile $38 million were destined to "Government and Civil Society" that has even more subsections: "Public Finance Management" received $820 thousand, "Human Rights" received $1.3 million, "Legal and Judicial Development" received $11 million, and "Democratic Participation and Civil Society" $30 million.

The total USAID funding drastically changed in 2025, by shrinking to $44,28 million. 27% of the prior year's sum. Nonetheless, "Governance" still had the largest amount of funding with $12 million. This was distributed in two main categories, "Conflict, Peace, and Security" $520 thousand, "Governance and Civil Society" $11 million. This last sum was distributed in the categories of "Public Finance Management" $120 thousand, "Legal and Judicial Development" $1 million, "Human Rights" $1.3 million, and "Democratic Participation and Civil Society" $9.1 million.

An examination of Guatemala's governance indicators from the World Bank (World Bank, 2023) reveals a challenging governance landscape. Key indicators demonstrate significant shortcomings: Control of Corruption is notably low at 14.15%, as is Rule of Law at 15.57%, and Government Effectiveness at 18.40%. Voice and Accountability also presents a concern with a score of 33.33%. While Regulatory Quality 41.51% and Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism 36.97% fare somewhat better, these figures underscore the need to consider these factors.

In summary, the drastic reduction of USAID funding in Guatemala, from $161.7 million to $44.28 million, represents a significant shock to the country's development assistance, with governance programs experiencing a notable decrease. While "Governance" remains the priority sector in the reduced budget, the sharp decline in funding across critical areas such as "Public Finance Management" and "Legal and Judicial Development" raises concerns about potential setbacks in institutional strengthening. These funding cuts take on added significance when considered alongside Guatemala's 2023 World Bank governance indicators, which reveal substantial weaknesses in key areas: Control of Corruption 14.15%, Rule of Law 15.575, Government Effectiveness 18.40%, and Voice and Accountability 33.33%. The combination of diminished external support and pre-existing governance deficits suggests that Guatemala faces a heightened risk of governance deterioration in the wake of these funding reductions

### *B. HONDURAS*

The total USAID funding in 2024 for Honduras was $170,26 million. From which $64 million were allocated to "Governance". This was distributed in other three categories: "Other Social Infrastructure and Services" $5million, "Conflict, Peace and Peace" $9.3 million, and "Government and Civil Society" $50 million. This last category was split into other subcategories: "Public Sector Policy and Administrative Management" $230 thousand, "Democratic Participation and Civil Society" $820 thousand, "Elections" $1 million, "Anti-corruption Organizations and Institutions" $4.6 million, "Legal and Judicial Development" $10 million, and "Decentralization and Support to Subnational Governments" $33 million.

In 2025, USAID Honduras only managed to defund 25% ($42,93 million) of its previous year funding before its programme suspension. The "Governance" category received $14 million, which were distributed between "Conflict, Peace and Security" $240 thousand, "Other Social Infrastructure and services" $250 thousand, and "Government and Civil Society" $13 million. This last category, distributes the funds between "Public Sector Policy and Administrative Management" ($300 thousand), "Democratic Participation" ($1,1 million), "Anti-corruption Organization and Institutions" ($4.1 million), and "Decentralisation and Support to Subnational Government" ($7.5 million).

An examination of Honduras's governance indicators from the World Bank (World Bank, 2023) reveals a similarly challenging governance landscape to Guatemala's, with some areas of even greater concern. Key indicators highlight significant shortcomings: Rule of Law and Control of Corruption are notably low, both registering at 15.09. Government Effectiveness also presents a substantial challenge with a score of 22.64, and Political Stability and Absence of Violence shows a weak score of 27.96. Voice and Accountability 35.29 and Regulatory Quality 32.08 are slightly higher but still indicate considerable room for improvement in the country's governance framework.

The precipitous decline in USAID funding for Honduras, plummeting from $170.26 million to a mere $42.93 million in 2025, signifies a drastic reduction in external support, particularly for governance initiatives. While governance remained a priority in the diminished budget, the substantial cuts across critical sub-sectors like "Legal and Judicial Development" and "Decentralization and Support to Subnational Governments," which previously received significant investment, pose a considerable risk to ongoing institutional strengthening efforts. Juxtaposed with Honduras's weak 2023 World Bank governance indicators, especially concerning scores in Rule of Law and Control of Corruption both 15.09, this withdrawal of aid suggests a heightened vulnerability to governance erosion and underscores the challenges ahead for sustaining progress in key areas (World Bank, 2023).

### *C. COSTA RICA*

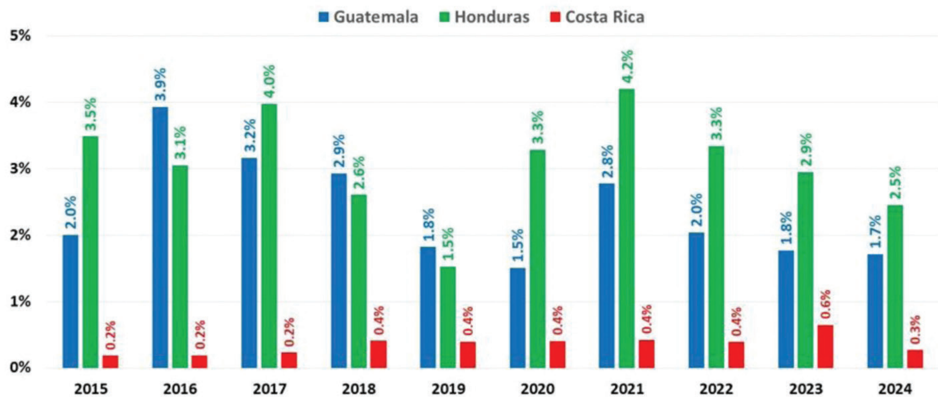
In contrast, Costa Rica's 2023 World Bank governance indicators (World Bank, 2023) paint a picture of relatively strong governance. The country demonstrates robust performance across several key dimensions: Voice and Accountability is high at 81.37, as is Political Stability and Absence of Violence at 83.89. Government Effectiveness

60.85, Regulatory Quality 69.81, Rule of Law 60.38, and Control of Corruption 72.64 also indicate a well-functioning governance system compared to its Central American neighbors. These figures suggest a significantly more resilient institutional framework in Costa Rica, further underscored by the fact that USAID's limited funding in 2024 and 2025 was primarily directed towards administrative costs rather than direct governance program support (Foreign Assistance, 2025).

It is important to take into account that U.S. foreign assistance was focused on supporting poverty reduction, civil insecurity, immigrant support, combating international narco-traffic, tending natural disasters, food scarcity, strengthening civil society, institutions, and democracy, among others. These areas of public policy in Central America had little to no resources allocated by governments, especially in Guatemala and Honduras. Therefore, as the United States limited its aid, there are few possibilities for central governments to allocate funds to these areas, mostly due to financial restrictions on public finance or because the same governments limit the resources aiming at strengthening civil society, transparency and accountability, as well as democracy.

The financial aid from the United States as a percentage of government revenue of Honduras' central government represented 2.5%, Guatemala 1.7%, and Costa Rica was 0.3% (see Graph 2). In 2021, after the pandemic, it registered the largest participation of foreign assistance: Honduras 4.2%, Guatemala 2.8%, and Costa Rica 0,4%. This aid was key to the correct management of vaccines against COVID-19 helping medical staff to efficiently reduce infection rates and deaths in Guatemala and Honduras. These two countries had previously experienced serious corruption cases during this period of time: Guatemala struggled with the purchase of Sputnik vaccines (Pérez Marroquín & Sánchez, 2024), and Honduras struggled with the acquisition of seven temporary hospitals that didn't fulfill healthcare requirements and represented a significant investment (González, 2021). If aid hadn't been available, a large number of citizens would have been affected by these.

The historical overview of USAID's engagement in Central America reveals a long-standing commitment to supporting various critical sectors, including governance. Notably, in Guatemala and Honduras, U.S. financial aid constituted a significant portion of government revenue, particularly evident in the aftermath of the pandemic. This external aid played a crucial role in addressing public policy needs often underfunded by national governments, as illustrated by the support for COVID-19 vaccine management. The documented corruption cases in Guatemala and Honduras during this period further highlight the potential ramifications of reduced external oversight and financial assistance, suggesting that the withdrawal of U.S. support could exacerbate existing vulnerabilities in these nations, given their limited domestic capacity and, at times, lack of political will to prioritize areas like civil society strengthening, transparency, and democratic accountability.




**Graph 2.** US financial aid as a percentage of central government tax revenues (Foreign Assistance, 2025)(Consejo Monetario Centroamericano, 2025)

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

- Varied Impact Based on State Capacity: Costa Rica, with its stronger domestic institutions and lower reliance on U.S. aid, is expected to be more resilient to these funding cuts. Conversely, Guatemala and Honduras face a high risk of regression in governance, justice, security, and public service delivery.
- Vulnerability due to Aid Cuts: The drastic reduction in U.S. foreign aid, specifically the termination of USAID programs in 2025, poses a risk to governance stability and development in Central America. Guatemala and Honduras are particularly vulnerable due to their historically high dependence on this aid for core functions and their weaker institutional frameworks compared to Costa Rica.
- Future assessments of prospects for enhancing the effectiveness of foreign aid: Previous foreign aid, while sometimes beneficial, has also exhibited drawbacks. It occasionally fostered dependency, bypassed or weakened national institutions by creating parallel structures, and resulted in reforms that lacked sustainability due to insufficient local ownership and political will. The MACCIH case in Honduras serves as a stark example of how external initiatives can falter without deep domestic commitment.
- Deep-Rooted Institutional Weaknesses: The region's vulnerability owing to Guatemala and Honduras is not solely a result of recent events but stems from historical patterns of state formation that prioritized territorial control, democratic weakness, and elite stability over building strong, centralized, and efficient institutional capacity. This legacy makes states susceptible to external shocks, and resistant to sustainable, internally driven reforms.
- Emergence of a "Governance Vacuum": The withdrawal of significant external funding and technical support, particularly in areas previously under-resourced by national governments (like judicial reform, anti-corruption, civil society support),

risks creating a “governance vacuum”. This could lead to deterioration in the rule of law, increased corruption, and diminished public services, impacting especially Guatemala and Honduras.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS (ESPECIALLY GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS):

- Strengthen Domestic Resource Mobilization: Prioritize enhancing national fiscal capacity through improved tax administration, collection, and public finance management to reduce dependency on volatile external aid, and the impact of its recent ample cuts, and build a stronger fiscal social contract with citizens.
- Invest in National Institutions: Focus resources on building the capacity, transparency, and accountability of core state institutions: judiciary, public administration, security sector.
- Enhance State Legitimacy and Accountability: Actively work to improve state-citizen relations through effective and equitable service delivery, anti-corruption measures, and meaningful engagement with civil society.
- Strategic Resource Allocation: In the face of reduced aid, governments must strategically allocate limited domestic resources to critical governance functions and essential public services. Countries should also promote more regional collaboration and increase cooperation with other international partnerships such as the European Union, Japan, United Kingdom, Canada, etc.

For International Donors (Future U.S. Engagement or Other Partners):

- Adopt Sustainable Capacity-Building Models: Strengthen aid strategies towards long-term support for endogenous institutional development, focusing on strengthening state capacity (fiscal, administrative, legitimacy) in ways that avoid creating dependency or undermining national systems.
- Contextualize Interventions: Promote more programs tailored to the specific historical-institutional context of each nation, recognizing the different capacities and challenges (e.g., Costa Rica vs. Guatemala/Honduras). Avoid imposing external models without adaptation (isomorphic mimicry).
- Ensure Predictability and Long-Term Vision: Avoid sudden, large-scale aid withdrawals that destabilize fragile states. Commit to predictable, long-term partnerships that support sustainable institutional change.
- Prioritize Local Ownership and Political Will: Emphasize support for reforms that demonstrate domestic leadership and broad-based buy-in. Support civil society organizations working to promote accountability and transparency.
- Improve Donor Coordination: Enhance collaboration among international donors and with national governments to ensure aid is coherent, avoids duplication, and effectively supports national priorities.

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# THE VIOLENT GENESIS OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH: DECOLONIZATION, 1945-1979

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article explores the violent genesis of the Global South, focusing on the decolonization of Western colonial empires from 1945 to 1979. It argues that independence was gained through sustained, often brutal, national liberation struggles against unwilling colonial powers. Even "peaceful" transitions occurred within a context of widespread anti-colonial violence. Using cases like Indonesia, Kenya, and Algeria, the text demonstrates persistent post-independence conflict and societal trauma, often exacerbated by Cold War geopolitics and internal fragilities. The Global South's emergence from violent opposition to imperialism is fundamental to understanding its contemporary landscape.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Global South; decolonization; colonial violence; postcolonialism; Cold War*

The term *Global South* functions as an umbrella designation encompassing the majority of states that, over the past two and a half centuries, have formally extricated themselves - at least in terms of international law - from the imperial spheres that came to dominate the globe during the modern era, which is generally traced back to the late fifteenth century (Jansen & Osterhammel, 2017). There are four notable exceptions to this trajectory, all of which originated within the same imperial formation, namely the British Empire: the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These polities exited the postcolonial condition through a series of distinct yet interconnected processes. On the one hand, they replicated - internally and, in some instances, externally - patterns of imperial rule and racial subjugation of their former colonial metropole. They are, of course, not unique in this respect; numerous states within the Global South have similarly imposed forms of internal colonialism or ethnically stratified domination upon indigenous populations. However, what distinguishes these four cases is their current status as integral components of the Global North, a status conferred not only through their economic and geopolitical trajectories but also through their symbolic and political recognition by former imperial powers. To what extent this recognition was shaped by their historical composition as predominantly white, protestant settler societies – long aligned with democratic norms broadly congruent with those of the United Kingdom – remains a subject of critical debate in the field of postcolonial studies.

Setting aside these exceptions, virtually all other regions of the globe that did not constitute metropolitan imperial territory might be considered part of the Global South. Naturally, there is no historiographical or analytical consensus on this matter. Some scholars propose a chronological threshold, preferring to confine the term to states that gained independence around, and especially after, the end of the Second World War. Oriented primarily toward the study of decolonization, this view is not universally accepted, as it effectively excludes the countries of Latin America from the Global South.

Others - by far the majority - regard the Global South as the exclusive product of the formal dissolution of the European colonial empires. In this understanding, the Global South encompasses the former colonies, protectorates, and mandated territories of the Portuguese, Spanish, French, British, Belgian, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, German, and Italian empires. The principal arguments for limiting the scope of decolonization to the Western European empires generally hinge on two interpretive frameworks: first, a narrative premised on a civilizational dichotomy between "the West" and "the rest"; and second, a heavily racialized reading of imperial structures. This interpretation frames decolonized states as sites where white European dominance was systematically imposed over indigenous or mestizo populations across an extended historical timeframe. (Nicolescu 2013; Thomas 2024).

It is not my intention to marginalize the fundamental importance of race in the study of colonial empires. However, from an analytical standpoint, it is difficult not to recognize a constitutive, functional, and structural similarity between Western empires and those of other regions of the globe, at least during the modern era. A more extensive argument - one that focuses less on cultural factors and more on political and economic dimensions - would be necessary to fully clarify this position, but such a discussion exceeds the scope of this article. In this work, I aim simply to illustrate the violence inherent in the decolonization process of the Western colonial empires that were still in existence at the conclusion of the Second World War. My use of this temporal marker does not imply that decolonization is essentially anchored to it, but because the world in which we live - shaped by certain international arrangements that continue to enjoy the highest legitimacy (notably the United Nations system and, especially, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) - is founded upon principles established during or immediately after 1945.

Drawing upon examples that are more or less known, and more or less (though predominantly less) debated within our public sphere, I attempt below to highlight several points that might enable a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the issues facing the Global South - especially those stemming from its genesis, which remains present in the collective memory of some generations living in states that attained independence between 1945 and 1979. Perhaps the most important insight to grasp is that decolonization should not be approached teleologically: it was neither inevitable nor predetermined to unfold in the manner it did. The future of colonial territories at the end of the Second World War was by no means fixed. Indeed, none of the French, British, Portuguese, Dutch, or Belgian empires planned to relinquish - let alone fully cede - their colonial assets. In the British case, only India and Palestine were clearly designated for independence as of 1945, while for the French, this applied solely to the former Ottoman mandated territories - Lebanon, which had already proclaimed its independence in 1943, and Syria, independent since 1946. On the contrary, the former colonizers planned a robust return to their colonies, including through European immigration, significant investments, and an increased economic role for the colonies within the imperial system. It was only through sustained national liberation struggles - often extremely violent - driven by political forces and local peoples, culminating in the decolonization of the majority of these territories (a significant number of territories, especially island possessions, remain under European sovereignty to this day).

Secondly, although the decolonization processes of numerous states within the British and French imperial spheres proceeded with relative peacefulness, these processes unfolded against the backdrop of prolonged and frequently intense anticolonial conflicts spanning nearly all major colonial territories - from Indochina and the East Indies, through East Africa, the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean basin, and North and West Africa, to Southern Africa. In other words, while it is accurate to observe that states such as Chad, the Central African Republic, Botswana, Togo, and Kuwait attained independence through largely peaceful means, these cases were nonetheless embedded within a highly violent context that decisively influenced and accelerated negotiations with colonial authorities.

Thirdly, the mere recognition of independence - culminating in admission to the United Nations - did not signify an end to violence in the former colonial territories, neither in the form of internal civil conflicts nor in hostilities involving the former imperial powers, even years after independence. The cases of Congo-Kinshasa, Biafra, Angola, Oman, Tanzania, Malaysia, Cyprus, and Rhodesia serve as illustrative examples in this regard. The following section provides an overview of selected violent episodes during the decolonization process and its aftermath, aimed at illustrating the aforementioned points.

The decolonization process of Indonesia between 1945 and 1949 was marked by significant violence and intense conflict between Dutch and British colonial forces, on the one hand, and Indonesian nationalist movements led by emblematic figures such as Sukarno (1901-1970) and Mohammed Hatta (1902-1980), on the other. This period was characterized by profound tensions arising from Indonesian national aspirations, exacerbated by the postwar context of Japanese withdrawal and the resurgence of European colonial ambitions in Southeast Asia. The Netherlands, initially supported indirectly by British troops, swiftly sought to reassert colonial dominance over the archipelago despite the proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945, by Sukarno and Hatta, at a time when the country remained under Japanese occupation. This declaration was not recognized by Dutch authorities, leading to a series of military operations aimed at reestablishing colonial control.

One of the most significant moments of violent confrontation was the Battle of Surabaya in November 1945, when British forces - deployed to facilitate the restoration of order following Japan's defeat - engaged in fierce clashes with Indonesian nationalist militias. This bloody confrontation resulted in thousands of casualties and persists in the collective memory as a powerful representation symbol of Indonesian resistance to colonial domination. The intense fighting in Surabaya underscored the determination of Indonesians to defend their independence at all costs, profoundly shaping the subsequent dynamics of the conflict.

The human toll of these confrontations is difficult to estimate with precision; however, historical studies suggest that the total number of casualties may range between 100,000 and 200,000 deaths, the majority of whom were Indonesian civilians. The conflict also precipitated a massive exodus of Dutch colonists, who were compelled to abandon the properties and privileged social positions they had held during colonial rule. Ultimately, international pressure, military exhaustion, and the economic costs of the war compelled the Netherlands to accept the political reality and initiate negotiations for a definitive withdrawal. Through the 1949 Hague Conference, the Netherlands formally recognized the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia, thereby ending the colonial era and paving the way for full independence and the consolidation of the new republic under the leadership of Sukarno and Hatta.

The dismantling of the British Empire in the second half of the twentieth century was, in numerous instances, marked by violence, interethnic conflicts, and undeclared wars involving both the British military and local resistance movements. The cases of Malaya, Kenya, and Cyprus exemplify how diverse anticolonial struggle strategies, combined with the specific ethnic, ideological, and geopolitical characteristics of each territory, led to independence while also inflicting enduring traumas upon their societies. Although all three territories experienced nationalist liberation movements, the nature of colonial violence and repression varied considerably.

In Malaya, the insurgency initiated in 1948 by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), led by Chin Peng (1924-2013), was profoundly shaped by the broader context of the Cold War. The MCP, predominantly composed of members of the substantial Chinese minority - constituting nearly 40% of the population - adopted guerrilla tactics partly inspired by Maoist experiences to overthrow the British colonial administration and establish a communist state (Mumford, 2012). The British response was systematic and sophisticated, involving an extensive counterinsurgency campaign that included the forced relocation of over 500,000 people to so-called "New Villages" - militarized camps designed to sever popular support for the insurgents within the Chinese community (Porch, 2013). Additionally, the British military engaged in sustained patrols, propaganda efforts, aerial operations, and the establishment of informant networks. Although the MCP continued its struggle for more than a decade, the loss of popular support and intensified military pressure ultimately led to the movement's failure. Independence was granted in 1957 through negotiated terms favorable to London, which retained economic and strategic influence, notably via an alliance system that persists today - the Five Powers Defence Arrangements, encompassing the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. Chin Peng and other communist leaders and fighters were exiled to Thailand, and the MCP was excluded from the postcolonial political process (French, 2011).

In turn, the decolonization of Kenya was marked by an exceptionally high level of violence and colonial brutality. The Mau Mau Rebellion, which began in 1952 and was primarily led by the Kikuyu population, was driven by land expropriations and the economic marginalization of African communities under colonial rule. It is worth noting that even after the end of the Second World War, thousands of British settlers arrived in Kenya and were granted land that had previously belonged to local populations. The British response was extremely repressive: mass detention camps were established, where hundreds of thousands were imprisoned, with numerous documented cases of torture, summary executions, and inhumane treatment (Elkins, 2005). Civilians were often caught between the violence of the British military and Mau Mau militias. At the same time, colonial authorities launched a campaign to delegitimize nationalist leaders, accusing Jomo Kenyatta (1897–1978) - Kenya's future president - of being the rebellion's spiritual leader, despite weak evidence. Kenyatta was imprisoned for nearly a decade, but his moral authority grew, and by the 1960s, he had become the leading figure in the independence movement (Branch, 2009). Under international pressure and facing political and military exhaustion, Britain began negotiations, and Kenya gained independence in 1963 (Newsinger, 2016). However, the exodus of settlers and the abrupt abandonment of thousands of African soldiers who had remained loyal to the British left deep scars on society. The war's legacy heavily influenced the political life of the post-colonial state.

The case of Cyprus stands out due to its combination of anticolonial struggle and interethnic conflict. The rebellion led by EOKA (the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) between 1955 and 1959 aimed not only at achieving independence from Britain but also at enosis - the nationalist project of uniting the island with Greece. The movement was led by Colonel Georgios Grivas (1897-1974), who employed a strategy of both urban and rural guerrilla warfare against the colonial administration, targeting British soldiers, colonial infrastructure, and local collaborators. The British military responded with a harsh campaign of repression, including mass arrests, torture, and executions. However, the violence was not confined to the fight against British rule. EOKA also initiated a systematic internal purge against Greek Cypriot communists (AKEL), who were viewed as traitors to the nationalist cause, and carried out attacks on the Turkish Cypriot minority - actions that further exacerbated interethnic tensions (Beckett, 2001).

The conflict thus rapidly degenerated into a latent civil war, and Britain - unable to maintain control and pressured by the geopolitical realities of the region, including the Greek-Turkish rivalry - agreed to negotiate a settlement. The Zurich and London Agreements of 1959 resulted in the formal independence of Cyprus but imposed a rigid constitution based on power-sharing between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, which ultimately served only to postpone and later exacerbate the crisis. Grivas did not live to see his vision realized: *enosis* was never achieved, and Cyprus remained a fragile state, marked by chronic instability and, eventually, by division.

A rebellion in the British colony of Aden - strategically located in the southern Arabian Peninsula - unfolded between 1963 and 1967 and was characterized by violence, ideological rivalries, and the entanglement of both regional and global geopolitical interests. Under British control since 1839, Aden had become a key commercial and military hub of the British Empire, particularly during the Cold War. By 1963, widespread local dissatisfaction with colonial rule, persistent poverty, and political marginalization had escalated into an armed insurgency (Porter, 2020).

Two rival movements emerged as key actors in the anticolonial struggle: the National Liberation Front (NLF), which had a Marxist orientation and received support from Egypt, and the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY), backed by the Arab League and more closely aligned with the conservative Arab monarchies. The conflict between these two factions was as intense as their respective struggles against British colonial forces, frequently devolving into armed clashes and political assassinations. As insurgent operations, strikes, and instability escalated, the British military faced mounting difficulties in maintaining control. Urban guerrilla operations, bombings, and targeted killings transformed Aden into a theater of war. In 1967, in the context of Britain's recently adopted policy of strategic withdrawal east of Suez, the government in London opted to disengage from the conflict without establishing a structured political transition. On 30 November 1967, the NLF seized power and proclaimed the People's Republic of South Yemen, an independent socialist state. The decolonization of Aden was rapid, violent, and chaotic - emblematic of the collapse of British influence in the Middle East and the onset of a new era marked by civil wars and foreign interventions across the Arabian Peninsula (Beckett, 2001).

The attainment of Zimbabwe's independence was a protracted and violent process, marked by intense confrontations between the ruling white minority and the national liberation movements representing the African majority population. In 1965, the government of Southern Rhodesia - a British colony with a significant white settler population - unilaterally declared independence from the United Kingdom under the leadership of Ian Smith (1919-2007). This Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) was an attempt to preserve white minority rule despite growing domestic resistance and widespread international condemnation. The declaration was not recognized by the United Kingdom or the United Nations, and was swiftly followed by international sanctions.

In response to this unilateral act, the indigenous population intensified its struggle for liberation through two major movements: the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), led by Robert Mugabe (1924-2019), and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo (1917-1999). These organizations launched a guerrilla war against the Smith regime - a conflict that came to be known as the Zimbabwe Liberation War, or the Second Chimurenga. African civilians found themselves trapped between the coercive tactics of the Rhodesian regime and the increasingly militant campaigns of the liberation movements (Clayton, 2002). Nevertheless, popular support for the liberation movements steadily grew, and mounting international pressure, combined with the escalating costs of the war, ultimately compelled the Salisbury regime to enter into negotiations.

In 1979, the Lancaster House negotiations took place in London, involving the British government, liberation movement leaders, and Rhodesian authorities. These talks culminated in an agreement that provided for free elections and a transition to independence conducted under British supervision. In March 1980, the elections were won by ZANU, and on April 18, 1980, Zimbabwe officially attained independence under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. This event symbolized the triumph of the anti-colonial struggle and the end of white minority rule in the former Rhodesian territory (Thomas, 2024).

The decolonization processes of French Indochina (1946-1954) and Algeria (1954-1962) rank among the bloodiest and most dramatic episodes in the history of the dismantling of the French colonial empire. Both conflicts combined conventional warfare with forms of guerrilla tactics, urban terrorism, and psychological warfare, fueled by both the colonized populations' desire for self-determination and Paris's refusal to relinquish control over territories perceived as symbols of its great power status. Nevertheless, the internal and international dynamics of the two conflicts differed, and the traumas inflicted left deep scars on French, Vietnamese, and Algerian societies.

The Indochina War broke out in 1946 after France refused to recognize the independence proclaimed by Vietnamese nationalist leaders, led by Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969), at the end of World War II. Ho, leader of the Vietnamese Communist Party, was supported by a well-organized party apparatus and the people's army commanded by General Vo Nguyen Giap (1911-2013). They developed the nationalist movement into an organized force capable of sustained military engagement and effective rural mobilization. The fight against the French combined guerrilla warfare with conventional battles, culminating in the 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu, where Giap's troops defeated a major French garrison through a combination of strategy, logistics, and popular mobilization. The defeat at Dien Bien Phu shocked French public opinion and accelerated peace negotiations. The Geneva Accords of the same year led to France's withdrawal from Indochina and the division of Vietnam into two states, setting the stage for the subsequent conflict between the communist North and the U.S.-backed South. Although France withdrew, this decision was not a voluntary strategic concession but the outcome of a clear military defeat and international pressure (Thomas, 2024).

The decolonization of Algeria was considerably more complex due to its unique status: Algeria was not regarded as a colony in the traditional sense but rather as an integral part of French territory. The presence of over one million European settlers ("pieds noirs") and entrenched institutional structures transformed the conflict into a total war, fought not only in rural mountains and villages but also in urban centers, between communities, and even within French society itself. The National Liberation Front (FLN), which initiated the insurgency in 1954, employed a combination of armed struggle, urban terrorism, and political propaganda. A defining episode was the Battle of Algiers (1956-1957), during which the FLN orchestrated a series of bombings in the colonial capital, provoking a ruthless response from the French military characterized by systematic torture, extrajudicial executions, and widespread intimidation. Although the FLN was tactically defeated, France's legitimacy as a colonial power was profoundly undermined both internationally and within domestic French public opinion (Garnier, 2018).

Concurrently, the Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS) emerged, composed primarily of French settlers and radical military personnel who vehemently opposed any concessions to the FLN. The OAS carried out attacks targeting Arabs, French authorities, and even civilians, thereby exacerbating the chaos and fueling a climate of pervasive violence. The mounting pressures of the war precipitated a profound political crisis in Paris, ultimately contributing to the collapse of the Fourth Republic and the return to power of Charles de Gaulle. Although de Gaulle initially pledged to maintain Algeria as an integral part of France, he came to the conclusion that the war was unwinnable. Consequently, he initiated negotiations with the FLN, which culminated in the signing of the Évian Accords in 1962 and the formal proclamation of Algerian independence (Pierre, 2023).

France's withdrawal was accompanied by a mass exodus of the *pieds-noirs* - European settlers who fled Algeria in a climate of panic and hostility. Simultaneously, thousands of *harkis* - Muslim auxiliaries who had fought alongside French forces - were abandoned, with many falling victim to violent reprisals in the aftermath of independence. The trauma experienced by both the *pieds-noirs* and the *harkis*, along with the enduring memory of atrocities committed by both sides, left deep scars not only in Franco-Algerian relations but also in the collective memory of those affected.

By comparison, the conflict in Indochina was waged by a unified communist movement within a more clearly defined framework of national liberation. In Algeria, however, the confrontation also assumed the characteristics of a civil war, marked by complex ethnic, ideological, and political dimensions. In both cases, France lost not only territorial control but also a foundational element of its colonial mythos (Mercuri, 2019). These conflicts represented a decisive rupture between the old imperial order and the emerging postcolonial nation-states, yet they left behind painful legacies: historical wounds, deeply divided societies, and transgenerational trauma. The wars in Indochina and Algeria brought a definitive end to France's aspirations of remaining a major colonial power and radically reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the postwar world.

The decolonization processes of Angola and Mozambique, which unfolded between the early 1960s and the mid-1970s, occurred within the broader context of the disintegration of the Portuguese colonial empire - the last in Western Europe to refuse recognition of African peoples' right to self-determination. In contrast to other colonial powers that negotiated transitions of authority, Portugal - under the authoritarian regimes of António de Oliveira Salazar and Marcelo Caetano - opted to defend its colonies through protracted and brutal wars. This led to extended and bloody conflicts in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. In fact, Portugal was unwilling to relinquish even its former Indian possessions, such as Goa, and only did so after being compelled by military force from India in 1961.

The Angolan War of Independence began in 1961 and was marked by a plurality of nationalist movements, each with distinct ideological orientations and ethnic bases: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA). Although united by a common adversary - the Portuguese colonial regime - these groups engaged in mutual conflict over political and military dominance. The MPLA, led by Agostinho Neto (1922-1979) and supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba, drew its primary support from urban and intellectual constituencies. UNITA, under the leadership of Jonas Savimbi (1934-2002), was initially backed by China and later by the United States, while the FNLA, led by Holden Roberto (1923-2007), operated primarily in the north and received assistance from the United States and Zaire (Reno, 2011). In this fragmented and volatile context, Portugal deployed tens of thousands of troops and pursued a counterinsurgency strategy that included summary executions, massacres, and severe repression of the civilian population. A notable example is the 1961 Baixa de Cassanje massacre, where thousands of Angolans were killed in retaliation for attacks against white settlers.

In Mozambique, the struggle for independence was led by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), a Marxist-oriented nationalist movement founded by Eduardo Mondlane (1920-1969) and later led by Samora Machel (1933-1986). Beginning in 1964, FRELIMO launched an insurgency in the northern regions of the country, relying on support from rural communities, neighboring states (particularly Tanzania), and the socialist bloc. FRELIMO's strategy combined guerrilla warfare with the construction of alternative social infrastructures - such as schools and clinics - in liberated zones, presenting not merely a military challenge to colonial rule but a comprehensive political project. Portuguese repression in Mozambique was as severe as in Angola, involving village burnings, arbitrary executions, and systematic torture. However, the lack of genuine popular support for the colonial regime and the cumulative strain of prolonged military engagement increasingly undermined Portugal's position.

The decisive factor in both cases was the Carnation Revolution of April 1974 in Portugal, when military officers - exhausted by the protracted colonial wars and disillusioned with the dictatorship - overthrew the regime in Lisbon. The new Portuguese government immediately embraced the principle of self-determination and initiated negotiations with the liberation movements. In Angola, the Alvor Agreements (1975) formally recognized independence; however, the rivalry among the MPLA, UNITA, and FNLA rapidly escalated into a devastating civil war, fueled by external powers within the broader context of the Cold War. In Mozambique, the transition unfolded in a more orderly manner, as FRELIMO was acknowledged as the sole legitimate representative, enabling the proclamation of the People's Republic of Mozambique on 25 June 1975. Nonetheless, conflict persisted: the anti-communist armed opposition - RENAMO - supported by neighboring regimes and Western actors, launched a brutal insurgency that would continue into the 1990s (Clayton, 2002).

In both instances, the Portuguese withdrawal was abrupt, chaotic, and marked by the mass exodus of tens of thousands of settlers - the *retornados* - who left behind not only their properties and public infrastructure, but also a void in the administrative apparatus. The absence of a genuinely negotiated transition, rooted in the enduring legacy of colonial economic dependency, polarized societies, and the intensification of external geopolitical interests, led to decades of postcolonial instability. The independences of Angola and Mozambique were thus victories of armed struggle, but they came at an enormous cost: massive human casualties, the destruction of infrastructure, and the transformation of both nations into arenas for Cold War proxy conflicts. At the same time, they symbolized the end of the Portuguese Empire and, more broadly, the closing chapter of European colonial rule in Africa.

The struggle for the independence of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands stands as one of the most remarkable anti-colonial movements in Africa. Waged between 1963 and 1974, it was led with strategic vision and organizational discipline by Amílcar Cabral (1924-1973). As the founder of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), Cabral succeeded in building a robust nationalist movement that combined military action with social organization and popular mobilization (Nugent, 2012). Unlike many other anti-colonial conflicts, the war in Guinea-Bissau was marked by a highly effective guerrilla strategy, which enabled PAIGC to systematically extend its authority across vast rural areas. In these liberated zones, the movement established schools, hospitals, and parallel governance structures. Cabral placed a strong emphasis on political education, the rejection of tribalism, and the central role of culture in the national liberation process. Crucially, the military capacities of the PAIGC were significantly enhanced through sustained support from the socialist bloc and neighboring African states.

Portugal's response was harsh, involving aerial raids, widespread repression, and the use of mercenaries. Nevertheless, the colonial authorities' inability to defeat the PAIGC on the ground, along with the assassination of Amílcar Cabral in 1973 by internal rivals, failed to halt the movement. That same year, the PAIGC unilaterally declared the independence of Guinea-Bissau - a move that was recognized by dozens of states. Following Portugal's Carnation Revolution in 1974, Lisbon officially acknowledged the independence of Guinea-Bissau, and later that of Cape Verde (Birmingham, 2018). Amílcar Cabral emerged as a symbol of a decolonization process driven not only by armed struggle but also by the power of ideas, securing his place as one of the most influential figures in Africa's twentieth-century liberation movements.

As previously noted, postcolonial violence involving former imperial powers remained a persistent feature in various regions of the Global South. The memory and trauma associated with such violence are crucial to understanding the conditions under which many postcolonial states and territories have evolved. One of the most chaotic and violent postcolonial episodes in Africa began with the independence of the Belgian Congo on 30 June 1960. Instead of facilitating a deliberate and systematic transition of governance, Belgium left behind a fragile state structure, an ill-prepared administrative elite, and an army still controlled by Belgian officers - factors that quickly precipitated the collapse of order. Within days of independence, the Congolese army (*Force Publique*) rebelled against its Belgian officers, which rapidly escalated into violent disorder, including attacks on colonial personnel and civilian settlers. Belgium responded with military intervention under the pretext of protecting its citizens.

Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961), Prime Minister and leader of the Congolese National Movement, attempted to assert control by advocating for strong national leadership and the territorial unity of the country. However, the crisis deepened with the secession of the mineral-rich province of Katanga, orchestrated by local leader Moïse Tshombe (1919-1969), who was backed by Belgian interests and multinational mining companies such as Union Minière. Katanga - critical to Congo's economy due to its vast reserves of copper and uranium - became the epicenter of a prolonged military and diplomatic conflict. Within this tense context, the Cold War played a decisive role. Fearing that Lumumba would align with the Soviet Union, the United States - through the CIA - covertly orchestrated efforts to remove him. The Soviet Union, in turn, supported Lumumba and condemned Western interference, sending military advisors and logistical assistance. Struggling against opposition from internal factions as well as foreign powers, Lumumba was arrested in September 1960, handed over to Katangan authorities, and executed in January 1961 with the complicity of Belgian and American intelligence services (Williams, 2021).

Following Lumumba's death, Congo became the scene of a latent civil war, during which the United Nations intervened through a peacekeeping mission (ONUC), yet failed to fully stabilize the country. Tshombe returned in 1964 as Prime Minister, backed by Western powers, but his regime remained unstable. In 1965, Colonel Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (1930-1997) - later known as Mobutu Sese Seko - previously an instrument of the CIA in Lumumba's removal, seized power through a coup d'état, establishing an authoritarian regime supported by the United States that sought to transform the newly formed state into a pillar of anti-communism (Kenyon, 2018). Thus, the post-independence violence in Congo was driven not only by internal fragility but also by Cold War geopolitical interests, economic colonialism, and local rivalries. The tragic fate of Lumumba, the fragmentation of the state, and the rise of Mobutu's dictatorship defined the trajectory of a Congo marked by chaos, foreign interventions, and unfulfilled promises of independence (Reno, 2011).

The civil war in Oman, also known as the Dhofar War (1965–1976), was one of the least publicized conflicts of the Cold War but represented a clear example of confrontation between a conservative monarchy supported by the West and a revolutionary movement backed by the socialist bloc. The conflict took place in the Dhofar province, an isolated region in southern Oman, characterized by extreme underdevelopment, lack of infrastructure, and a population marginalized both economically and politically (Mockaitis, 1995).

The insurgent movement initially began as a local revolt against the authoritarian regime of Sultan Said bin Taimur (1910-1972), one of the most reactionary leaders in the Arab world. He banned education for women, employed corporal punishment against dissidents, and maintained the country in a feudal archaic state. The rebellion quickly evolved into an organized Marxist movement, known as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (and later, the Arabian Gulf), which aimed to overthrow the monarchy, establish a socialist state, and fully liberate Oman from British colonial influence.

The Soviets and, most notably, China provided logistical and ideological support to the insurgents, while the sultanate became a strategic focal point for British and American geopolitical interests in the Persian Gulf. London played a crucial military role by deploying advisers, SAS (Special Air Service) troops, RAF pilots, and military equipment (Hughes 2009). Similarly, the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran, a key U.S. ally in the region, intervened directly with regular troops to defend the Omani monarchy, fearing the spread of revolution to its own minority-dominated provinces.

A decisive turning point occurred in 1970 when Sultan Said bin Taimur was deposed by his son, Qaboos bin Said (1940-2020), in a palace coup discreetly supported by the British. The new Sultan initiated an extensive modernization process, investing in infrastructure, education, and social services, thereby winning over popular support for the government. Concurrently, the war was won through a combination of a harsh military offensive and a "hearts and minds" counterinsurgency strategy, previously employed by the British in Malaya. The conflict officially ended in 1976 with the complete defeat of the insurgents, though not without significant costs. Thousands lost their lives, and the repression was severe. Nonetheless, the regime's victory consolidated Oman's strategic position in the region and transformed the sultanate into a stable Western ally in the Persian Gulf. The Dhofar conflict remains a revealing example of how local wars during the decolonization period were intensified by the global dynamics of the Cold War, achieved not solely by force of arms but equally through prudent reforms and pivotal international support (Dunbabin, 2014).

The *Konfrontasi* (1963-1966) was a political-military conflict initiated by Indonesia against the formation of the Federation of Malaysia, an initiative supported by the United Kingdom that aimed to unite Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah into a new, independent state allied with the West. Indonesian President Sukarno perceived this move as a neocolonial project designed to encircle and isolate Indonesia, which at the time was asserting itself as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement and a nationalist revolution inspired by socialism. Under the slogan "Ganyang Malaysia!" ("Crush Malaysia!"), Sukarno launched an undeclared military campaign involving armed incursions, sabotage, and attacks on Malaysian and British positions, particularly in Borneo (Petraeus & Roberts, 2024).

*Konfrontasi* was an atypical conflict, situated on the borderline between conventional warfare and special operations. Indonesia infiltrated regular troops and guerrillas into the Malaysian states of Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak), hoping to incite a local uprising against the federation's formation. In response, Britain deployed Commonwealth troops – including units from Australia and New Zealand – to defend the new federation and repel Indonesian incursions. British special forces (SAS) played a crucial role, conducting reconnaissance and counterattacks in the difficult terrain of Borneo's mountainous jungles (Newsinger, 2016).

The conflict had a significant ideological dimension. In the midst of the Cold War, the West viewed Malaysia as a bulwark against communist expansion in Southeast Asia, while Sukarno, supported by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and allied with Beijing and Moscow, presented Indonesia as the leader of the Asian anti-imperialist revolution. However, the Indonesian campaign proved unpopular among the population and generated enormous economic costs. The internal crisis deepened in 1965 with an attempted coup attributed to the PKI, brutally suppressed by the military, leading to the collapse of Sukarno's regime.

In 1966, General Suharto (1921-2008), who had effectively taken power in Indonesia, ended *Konfrontasi* through a normalization agreement with Malaysia, also marking Indonesia's transition to a pro-Western military dictatorship. *Konfrontasi* resulted in thousands of deaths but did not escalate into a full-scale war, remaining largely a war of attrition fought in isolated areas. Nevertheless, it had major implications: it contributed to Sukarno's fall, consolidated Malaysia's geopolitical position, and reaffirmed Britain's military commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, *Konfrontasi* was not only a regional clash but also a significant episode of the Cold War (Radchenko, 2024).

In the pages above, I have tried to illustrate with examples from three continents the highly turbulent context surrounding the emergence of the Global South after the end of the Second World War. The independence of these countries was achieved not because of, but rather against the will of the colonial powers, which were more interested in profit and domination than in the right of nations to self-determination and the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also worth noting that the other countries that became sovereign after 1945, for which the process of gaining independence was more peaceful, experienced their own traumas and political struggles for autonomy. They managed to break free from colonial control while the European imperial powers were militarily engaged in other theaters of operation. Moreover, the mere departure of European forces and authorities often marked only the prelude to the outbreak of new conflicts amid the ruins of socio-political structures that the former rulers had cared little about, yet desired so much to control. The Global South was born out of violent opposition to all forms of European-style imperialism. The conflicts and complaints that continue to this day should be understood against this backdrop, appreciating their causes and, perhaps, their justifications.

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# SERBIA AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH: BETWEEN NON-ALIGNMENT POLICY AND A MULTI-ALIGNMENT STRATEGY

**Aleksandar Mitić**

**ABSTRACT:** *The Republic of Serbia pursues a foreign policy which stands out among its Balkan neighbors and wider European Union members and candidates. The legacy of socialist Yugoslavia's leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, the 1999 NATO bombings, and the 2008 EU-US masterminding of "Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence", in violent breach of international law, play an important role in the strategic posturing of the country, reducing the chances of West-bound bandwagoning. Indeed, since 2014, Belgrade has been negotiating EU membership in a sluggish if not stalled process, while at the same time reinforcing its military neutrality. The struggle to preserve territorial integrity regarding Kosovo has furthermore implied a strong diplomatic leaning in the UN Security Council on the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, including decisions not to harmonize with EU restrictive measures against the two. In the process, Serbia has strengthened its energy cooperation with Russia, elevated the formal status of its bilateral relations with China to the highest level in Europe, and pursued an active diplomatic policy towards the Global South vying for support regarding Kosovo and economic diversification. Such an approach, with its hedging features, has not been welcomed by Brussels. This paper looks at the context of Serbia's quest to (re)establish close cooperation with the Global South, at the opportunities and also at the limitations of this pursuit.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Serbia; Global South; Non-Aligned Movement; China; hedging; multi-alignment*

## THE GLOBAL SOUTH: A GEOPOLITICAL TRAJECTORY CHARACTERIZED BY REDUCED TENSIONS

Reflecting on the 60th anniversary of laying grounds to the future Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the 1961 Belgrade Conference of Non-Aligned Countries, the Republic of Serbia (as legal successor state of socialist Yugoslavia) and the Institute of International Politics and Economics (as one of the originators of the Conference) hosted a series of events in September 2021, including a high-level conference, celebrating the historical trajectory and future opportunities for NAM and the Global South in general.

Set in the global context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the escalating crisis over Ukraine, the Belgrade conference gathered representatives from 105 countries and nine international organizations. While delegates focused on the need to revamp multilateralism and development paths, boost solidarity amid the pandemic and avoid further militarization, Serbia enjoyed the status of confirmation as successor of Yugoslavia's legacy and reinforced yet another of its key foreign policy avenues. It was seen as representing a "comparative advantage and positive determinant in the development of political and economic cooperation with the countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and America, which does not jeopardise its other foreign policy priorities and goals in terms of developing interdependence and integration into European and wider international processes" (Dimitrijević, 2021).

Indeed, pursuing key national interests without jeopardizing "other foreign policy priorities" has been one of the most delicate balancing acts facing Serbia's diplomacy in recent years and decades. How to reconcile the EU integration path with the preservation of the country's territorial integrity in relations to the southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, when the majority of EU members have recognized "Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence" in flagrant violation of the UN Charter? How to accommodate EU talks with the decision not to align with Brussels' sanctions against the Russian Federation, Serbia's key supporter in the UN Security Council? Or with the elevation of relations with another key UNSC ally, the People's Republic of China, to the highest level in Europe – the building of the Community of China and Serbia with a Shared Future in the New Era, accompanied by the sole Free Trade Agreement with Beijing in Central and Eastern Europe? Finally, with the incessant diplomatic struggle against the lobbying of some key EU countries with regards to the policy of recognition of "Kosovo's UDI" in the Global South.

While formally in membership talks with the EU since 2014, Belgrade insists it is pursuing an "independent foreign policy", based on its military neutrality, the need to preserve its territorial integrity and Serbian national interests in the Balkans, and to diversify its economic relations, while adapting its proclaimed "four-pillar" policy (EU/U.S./Russia/China) to the rising multipolar landscape in the international arena. In such circumstances, the Global South has found an important place in Serbia's foreign policy thinking: through the China-led Belt and Road Initiative, through BRICS and NAM, as well as through bilateral agreements involving both diplomatic consultations over Kosovo and economic cooperation. While there has been more discussion on Serbia's "Eastward" hedging (Russia and China) and Western attempts to make Serbia "de-hedge", Belgrade has also paved "geopolitically less contentious" avenues towards numerous Global South partners.

In this paper, we will look at the place of the Global South in Serbia's foreign policy thinking, evaluating motivations and opportunities, but also constraints. Such an approach could help the understanding of Serbia's foreign policy positions, but also provide an opportunity for neighboring Balkan and Central and Eastern European countries to contrast and compare their own experiences and adapt pathways to reap benefits.

## THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF STRATEGIC BALANCING IN TODAY'S MULTIPOLAR INTERNATIONAL ORDER

For small states, such as Serbia, the process of multipolarization presents important challenges. Adapting to the changes while preserving traditional national interests and commitments requires agile upgrades of grand strategies and associated strategic narratives. For Serbia, multipolarization and the reshuffling of great power capabilities have actually meant more opportunities. This is largely due to Serbia's "non-Western uniqueness" in the region and in Europe. The foundation of this uniqueness can be found in the clash of strategic narratives between supporters and critics of the Western "rules-based world order" (RBO). The RBO is perceived by its supporters as the "foundation of liberal internationalism and a resilience mechanism in preserving the post-Cold War order – epitomized by the US 'unipolar moment' – against non-Western 'autocratic transgression'" (Mitić, 2024a). However, this narrative is challenged by Russia, China, numerous countries of the Global South, but also – albeit not formally – by Serbia. These critics underline that the RBO "incorporates a set of mechanisms that selectively lean on elements of international law, interpret them freely and creatively, and align them with the interests of the political West, using double standards and the principle of 'unique', sui generis cases to fit the needs, thus effectively undermining the UN system" (Mitić, 2024a). Such critical view of the RBO, adopted by proponents of multipolarization, paints it as "the United States' alternative to international law, an order that encapsulates international law as interpreted by the United States to accord with its national interests" (Dugard, 2023, 225). Talmon considers that the term "rules-based order", in fact, "blurs the distinction between binding and non-binding rules, giving the impression that all States and international actors are subject to this order, irrespective of whether or not they have consented to these rules" (Talmon, 2019). He points to the fact that while international law is "general and universal", the "rules-based order seems to allow for special rules in special–sui generis cases" (Talmon, 2019). Indeed, Serbia has been a key European "victim" of the RBO in the last quarter of the century. First, through the NATO 1999 aggression, a bombing campaign unauthorized by the UN Security Council. Then, building on 1999, the EU-U.S. 2008 masterminding of "Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence". The Kosovo "UDI" was recognized by the large majority of Western countries (with the exceptions of Romania, Spain, Greece, Slovakia and Cyprus) in flagrant violation of international law and with use of the "sui generis/unique case" argumentation, but effectively setting a "double standard" for the respect of territorial integrity of states which tremors continue to shake the world's hotspots today.

In practice, the five "non-recognizers" among EU members have opened the possibility for Serbia to continue with EU integration and indeed officially start negotiations in 2014. However, at the UN SC level, Serbia has to count on EU's two geopolitical rivals – Russia and China. In addition, Serbia's EU negotiations started at the time when the EU was still reeling from the shock of the economic crisis, unable if not unwilling to assist in Serbia's economic development recovery. This role was immediately filled by two countries of the Global South – China through its Belt and Road Initiative, which helped Serbia build transportation infrastructure and save its key mining and metal processing companies, and the United Arab Emirates through investments and credit lines which helped Belgrade stabilize its troubled finances.

How can we then describe Serbia's foreign policy? Cold-war era concepts outlined by Walt (Walt, 1987), such as "balancing" (allying with others against the prevailing threat) and "bandwagoning" (allying with a potentially threatening power) do not fully apply to Serbia's current strategic posturing. Indeed, as argued by Nikolić, "no evidence is found to indicate the adoption of pure forms of balancing or bandwagoning in Serbian behavior", which is due to its proclaimed military neutrality (Nikolić, 2024). The military neutrality was adopted in the context of the threat of Kosovo's UDI in 2007, when the Serbian Assembly adopted the Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and the Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia.

Instead, the concept of "hedging" has been recently applied to Serbia's strategy. The concept of *hedging* has originated in the Global South. It has featured most importantly in the literature on China and Southeast Asia (Goh, 2005; Gerstl, 2022; Kim, 2023) and to the Middle East (Salman and Geeraerts, 2015; El-Dessouki and Mansour, 2020; Fulton, 2020). However, it is increasingly being mentioned in the Serbian case (Ejdus, 2023; Dettmer, 2023; Nikolić, 2024; Mitić, 2024a). Mitić and Nikolić both identify the sources of Serbia's hedging in the aftermath of "Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence" and the simultaneous rise of multipolarization. Serbia's hedging strategy has several underpinnings, grounded mostly in its slow, if not stalled membership talks with the European Union. Primarily, these are due to Chapter 23 (respect of rule of law – a major hurdle for all candidate states), Chapter 31 (alignment with EU foreign policy) and Chapter 35 ("normalization of relations" with the Kosovo Albanian leadership in Priština), in addition to chronic challenges of EU "enlargement fatigue" and lack of political will (Mitić, 2024b). These hurdles have prompted Serbia's "non-Western" turn, which has manifested itself in the struggle for the support on Kosovo at the UNSC (China and Russia) and at the General Assembly and UN bodies such as Interpol and UNESCO (Global South). In addition, Serbia has increased military-technical cooperation with Russia and China (imports) and the Global South (exports), as well as cooperation in energy security (Russian gas), mining and infrastructure (China's investments and loans) and overall trade diversification. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, particularly since 2022, Serbia's hedging has turned more prominently in China's direction.

There are other Global South-related concepts which have implications for Serbia. India has shifted from non-alignment towards "multi-alignment", as a "series of parallel relationships that strengthen multilateral partnerships and seek a common approach among the grouping towards security, economic equity and the elimination of existential dangers like terrorism" (Drishtiias, 2022). Yet, India has done so through formal memberships in BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC, with Russia, Iran and Central Asia) and QUAD (with the U.S., Japan and Australia), while Serbia remains outside NATO, the CSTO and (for now) the EU or BRICS – although it is participating in lower-tier arrangements with each.

A "multi-vector" policy – maximizing national interest through diversified partnerships – as exemplified by Azerbaijan, Serbia's strategic partner, has also been relevant due to the strategic functionality of particular relationships (energy, defense, diplomacy, culture) and the dexterity needed to navigate through them in a complex geopolitical environment (Azemedia, 2025).

The Global South cases of South Africa, Brazil or Uzbekistan follow these principles of multi-alignment or multi-vector foreign policies.

Finally, Mihaylov takes a more holistic approach, and delves into Yugoslavia's NAM legacy, to consider that Serbia is pursuing a "third way" geopolitical positioning of searching for benefits from geopolitical poles while remaining outside of them, which includes several features, including military neutrality, political multi-vector strategy, trade diversification, and "external projection of domestic cultural-historical sentiments" (Mihaylov, 2024).

## STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERBIA IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH

There are a number of factors impacting on Serbia's Global South pathways.

### The Non-Aligned factor

The Republic of Serbia, as the legal successor to the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia - one of the originators of the idea of the Non-Aligned Movement and host of the first summit of non-aligned countries in 1961 - builds up on this historical and political legacy. The NAM was set up in an atmosphere of bipolar confrontation, with great power pressure on third countries to align with respective blocs. The uniqueness of a European non-bloc country interested in leading a pro-active global approach aimed at liberation struggles and decolonization in Africa, Asia and South America was infused into Belgrade's foreign policy thinking well beyond the Cold-War era, notwithstanding current statecraft capabilities and international context.

Being a prominent member of an organization spanning four continents and including the majority of UN members has meant a wealth of opportunities for developing bilateral economic and political relations. Nowadays, Serbia is not a full member of the NAM, but it continues to honour both the legacy and the connections made. Thus, it gathered NAM leaders for the 50$^{th}$ anniversary of the Belgrade Conference in 2011, and then for the 60$^{th}$ anniversary a decade later. Indeed, "NAM remains one of the major institutional relics of the Cold War today, still very much active and present in world affairs, though with a somewhat diminished global role and influence as compared to the heyday years of the 1960s and 1970s, but, nonetheless, one of the relevant institutional instruments through which the Third World, i.e. Global South, still exercises a tangible collective role in international politics in general and inside the UN in particular" (Čavoški, 2021). Thus, at the December 2024 Africa-Serbia Dignity Conference, featuring over 40 African delegations, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić said Belgrade was Africa's "greatest friend in entire Europe" (Politika, 2024). Serbia's Foreign Minister Marko Đurić argued, while expressing "extreme interest" in strategic partnership with African countries, that "we genuinely in many ways feel like the Africans of Europe, not only because we have helped to counter colonial aspirations for decades, but because we share the same outlook for the future and we want to continue contributing to all those countries aspiring to remain on their own independent path" (Đurić, 2024a).

Indeed, Serbia is nowadays "reviving historical links made through the NAM" to build new partnerships at a time when "Brussels is going through an identity crisis and EU members are fighting their own economic problems amid a changing world" (Čadež, 2025). As argued by the President of Serbia's Chamber of Commerce Marko Čadež, "the fast urbanization and infrastructure needs of Africa are a perfect fit for Serbia's expertise in construction and engineering. Our companies can bring knowledge and innovation to African countries, building new trade routes for Serbia's exports" (Čadež, 2025). Indeed, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce is planning to open its first African office in Cairo in 2025, after Serbia and Egypt signed a Free Trade Agreement in 2024. Such focus on Africa is understandable, given the fact that Serbia, despite excellent historical and political relations, had a trade exchange with the continent of merely 700 million euros in 2022, albeit with a 20 percent yearly growth (Rilak, 2023). Indeed, to many Global South countries, particularly those active in the NAM, Serbia's foreign policy posturing is, at least partially, reminiscent of the Yugoslav era, in particular its military neutrality, the decision not to seek membership in military alliances, political independence and non-Eurocentric outreach.

### The role of the Kosovo issue in shaping Serbia's foreign policy agenda

Yet, beyond trade, a key focus for Serbia's diplomacy with African and other Global South countries is the question of Kosovo. Around two thirds of Global South countries have not recognized "Kosovo's UDI". Among these are some of the leading countries of the Global South, including India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Iran, Mexico, Argentina, Morocco and the Philippines. Furthermore, 28 countries of the Global South have revoked their recognition of "Kosovo's UDI" since 2017, including Ghana, the Central African Republic and the Maldives. For Serbia, as well as for Western countries pushing for the recognition of the "Kosovo's UDI", the Global South has been an arena of intensive diplomatic battle and lobbying. Indeed, the votes from the Global South have been decisive during the failed bids by "independent Kosovo" to gain membership in bodies such as UNESCO and Interpol.

### The Chinese influence on Serbia's external strategic outlook

For Serbia, the key country in the Global South has been China. While socialist Yugoslavia and China had their ups and downs since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1955, and Beijing remained on the sidelines of the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s, the major turnaround has been the NATO bombings of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in May 1999. This event sparked outrage in China against NATO, and the U.S. in particular, but also brought Beijing and Belgrade closer than ever. When Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Europe for the first time since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, he chose the symbolic 25th anniversary of the bombing of the embassy, on May 7, 2024, to visit Belgrade and to argue that "the China-Serbia friendship, forged with the blood of our compatriots, will stay in the shared memory of the Chinese and Serbian peoples". The memory culture has become one of the four cornerstones of what is dubbed China-Serbia "iron-clad friendship". The second cornerstone has been political cooperation. Since 2009, when Serbia and China signed a Strategic Partnership, bilateral relations were elevated twice – both during Xi's visits to Belgrade: in 2016, to the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and in 2024, to the building of a China-Serbia Community with a Shared Future in the New Era. Such level of cooperation, the highest in Europe, is in line with the building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, the core concept of Xi Jinping's diplomatic thought and the objective of China's diplomacy. It has made Serbia stand out among the Central and Eastern European countries which have been participating in the format known as China-CEEC (formerly 16+1). A particular contrast can be made with the Czech Republic. While Serbia and the Czech Republic both signed agreements on Comprehensive Strategic

Partnership with China in 2016, their trajectories have been diametrically opposed since. Relations between Prague and Beijing deteriorated following a series of Czech political actions undermining China's sovereignty and territorial integrity with regards to Taiwan and Tibet. When Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met his Czech counterpart Jan Lipavsky in 2025, he "expressed the hope that the Czech side would engage in earnest self-reflection, develop the right perspective about China, and take concrete actions to rebuild trust with China" (Xinhua, 2025). On the other side, Serbia went on to a full upgrade of relations with China, with the two countries mutually expressing absolute support in terms of protection of territorial integrity.

In the economic sphere, there has been a fulgurant ascension of China's importance for Serbia's development over the last decade. For Beijing, Serbia, an EU candidate but not a member, has been an important entry point to Europe: China chose Serbia to build there its first European bridge, highway and high-speed railway. Serbia was the first country to obtain Chinese weapons systems through the acquisition of a battery of FK-3 medium-range, road-mobile, surface-to-air missiles, made by the China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation. Serbia also became the first Central and Eastern European country to sign such a Free-Trade Agreement with China, which went into effect on July 1, 2024. The agreement was a major contribution to Serbia's unique FTA network: it is the only European country with free trade agreements with the EU, the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, Turkey and China, thus becoming a potential hub for duty-free exports of most key industrial products – with only a few exceptions and annual quotas - to more than 2.5 billion people. Furthermore, China has been the top investor country in Serbia since 2022, while three top Serbian exporters are Chinese companies. In addition to new automotive, green energy and mining projects, the country is set to launch in 2025 the Serbian portion of the Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway, a flagship project for the Belt and Road Initiative, while Chinese companies aim to play a major role in the infrastructure and development projects related to the 2027 Specialized Expo, to be held in Belgrade.

Finally, the fourth cornerstone has been the shared vision of the global geopolitical transition toward multipolarity and a world order based on international law and the United Nations Charter instead of the RBO system based on double standards regarding the territorial integrity of states. Thus, at the October 2024 "Dialogues on China" conference, hosted by the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia Marko Đurić defined Serbia's foreign policy as "Strategic Independence with Serbian Characteristics", in reference stemming from Beijing's formulations about "Chinese characteristics" (Đurić, 2024b). These "characteristics" are compatible with Xi Jinping's new Chinese initiatives – the Global Development Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative - initiatives that recognize the importance of diversity and endorse the right of nations to have their paths, as well as the Global Security Initiative, under which China drafted its joint plan with Brazil for the resolution of the conflict in Ukraine, an initiative President Vučić labelled as "common sense".

## LIMITATIONS ALONG THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Despite opportunities and promising avenues, Serbia's cooperation with the Global South also faces obvious hurdles. The primary source is, expectedly, Belgrade's membership talks with the EU. In fact, Serbia has often declined to harmonize with EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy declarations against Global South "non-recognizers", sparking the ire of Brussels. Regarding interior affairs, Belgrade still holds a visa-free regime with 16 countries that are on the EU list of visa-required countries, most of them from the Global South. Nevertheless, on both these issues, Serbia has also sought to improve its harmonization with the EU. In 2024, Serbia augmented its harmonization with the CFSP declarations, reaching the level of harmonization of 59 percent, in comparison with 48 percent in 2022 and 54 percent in 2023 (Novaković, 2025). In terms of the visa policy, in 2024 and 2025, Serbia re-imposed visas for the citizens of four countries of the Global South – Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Mongolia (Tanjug, 2025).

Yet another contentious point with regards to the Global South has been the issue of bilateral agreements with third countries. In addition to the FTA with China, Serbia has recently negotiated such agreements with the UAE and Egypt. With regards to the Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT), a large number of the 46 BITs in force are with Global South countries, and Serbia is planning to sign new ones with Bahrain, Uzbekistan, India, the Kyrgyz Republic and Equatorial Guinea. The European Commission has called on Serbia to develop a strategy for "amending or terminating" BITs that fall short of EU standards and expose the country to risks due to the broad and open language used (European Commission 2024, 95).

Indeed, the EU has launched a series of actions and policies aimed at Serbia's "de-hedging", that is to encourage the country, to reduce, if not abandon its hedging strategy in the context of geopolitical competition. In 2024, the "de-hedging" has involved Serbia signing with the EU an agreement on a strategic partnership regarding sustainable raw materials, battery value chains, and electric vehicles as to limit Belgrade's energy dependence on Russia and China's access to lithium and other critical minerals in Serbia (Hodgson, 2024). Serbia has also acquired 12 French Rafales warplanes instead of Chinese J-10C. A particularly strong signal of "de-hedging" has been the pressure on President Vučić not to attend the BRICS summit in Kazan in October 2024. Instead of attending the summit, featuring some of the key Global South countries, Vučić sent a ministerial delegation to Kazan, while hosting in parallel in Belgrade EU leaders, including European Commission President Ursula Von der Layen, Polish and Greek prime ministers Donald Tusk and Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Yet another potentially constraining factor could be the policy of the U.S. under President Donald Trump. In fact, Serbia has sought to elevate its relations with Washington, and has established solid links with the Trump administration. However, Trump's rivalry with China could impact on Serbia in the case of U.S. attempts at rooting out Chinese investments from the region. Washington might be tempted to use "wedging" strategies - coercive or accommodative - which intend to "move or keep a potential adversary out of an opposing alliance" (Crawford, 2021). Washington has in the past attempted to do so in the case of Huawei and 5G. Under the 2020 Washington agreement, signed by Vučić, under the auspices of Trump, Belgrade committed to a number of actions, including acquiring 5G equipment "supplied by untrusted vendors", an indirect hit at Chinese providers. Under the same agreement, Belgrade and the Albanian authorities in "Kosovo" committed not to pursue policies of seeking (de-)recognition internationally. Such commitment was required by Washington to stop Belgrade's strong diplomatic success aimed at de-recognition of "Kosovo's UDI", which was at the time in full gear, running in parallel, although not directly linked, with China's gains in its policy of de-recognition of Taiwan among Global South countries. However, while Belgrade lost momentum with the commitment, the Albanian authorities in Priština continued to plan inroads into the Global South, particularly with the sponsorship of Turkey, resulting in recognitions of "Kosovo's UDI" in 2025 by Kenya and Sudan.

## CONCLUSIONS

Socialist Yugoslavia, with its rather impressive statecraft repertoire, was punching beyond its weight during the Cold-War era of NAM. Nowadays, its legal successor, the Republic of Serbia, has a smaller array of capabilities, although it maintains a solid diplomatic network in the Global South and has a proactive policy. Its role is nevertheless far for being central anymore, and for many countries of the Global South, without Belgrade's political leadership in NAM, Serbia is geographically too distant and economically too small.

Nevertheless, Belgrade has not given up on its Global South ambitions. These are due to the specific (geo)political code of the country, with its military neutrality, and an Eastward, Eurasian hedging policy in a Western, Euro-Atlantic environment, in the context of the country's need to battle for its territorial integrity regarding the province of Kosovo. The diplomatic fight for Kosovo, particularly after the UDI in 2008 and its recognition by the majority of the West, has pushed Serbia towards re-establishing closer links with the Global South, a direction it had lost or put on pause during the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s and transition towards an EU path in the 2000s. This policy has brought important successes in preventing further recognitions, and has prompted Serbia to revive the NAM legacy.

In parallel, Serbia has made a breakthrough in its relations with China, particularly since President Xi Jinping launched his Belt and Road Initiative. The result has meant not only a strong Chinese economic presence in Serbia and the elevation of bilateral political relations to the highest level in Europe, but also Serbia's further interest in (re)establishing connections with China's BRI partners in the Global South.

However, despite unremarkable results in the EU membership talks, Serbia, as a candidate country, has aimed to harmonize with Brussels its policies towards the Global South in external and domestic domains, particularly with regards to the visa policy. Its close relations with China are also under scrutiny by Western powers, particularly the United States. Further de-hedging and "wedging" policies against Serbia's foreign policy and economic diversification can thus be expected, testing Belgrade's agility to navigate in the stormy waters of multipolarization. Still, Serbia's legacy of the anti-colonial NAM and its modern fight against double standards with regards to the respect of territorial integrity are looked upon with sympathy in Asia, Africa and Latin America. While Serbia's position and posturing are unique and at times incompatible with its neighbors, its experiences can present valuable insights and lessons for countries seeking to expand cooperation with the Global South.

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# RUSSIA IN THE SAHEL: A NEW FRONT IN THE REIMAGINED COLD WAR

**Ulf Laessing**

**ABSTRACT:** *This article analyzes Russia's growing influence in the Sahel, specifically in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, primarily through the deployment of mercenaries such as the Africa Corps. It argues that Russia leverages existing anti-French sentiment and state fragility, exacerbating insecurity and civilian displacement, which directly contribute to increased migration towards Europe. Russia's strategic objective is to undermine the European Union's interests and establish a "new Cold War front". While successful in shifting regional alliances, Russia's engagement may be peaking due to logistical challenges. The article concludes by urging Europe to develop a proactive, independent strategy for the region.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sahel; Russia; migration; European security*

A Russian Antonov transport landed recently in the Malian capital, with Russian mercenaries spending hours in broad daylight discharging its load right next to the main passenger terminal at Bamako airport. The plane was just another regular supply flight, shipping anything from ammunition to new fighters for Russia's military operation in the Sahel. Moscow has sent since late 2021 weapons and mercenaries to the military-run Sahel countries Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to help battle jihadists, weaning them off the Western camp and undermining Europe's interests.

Geopolitics are changing in the Sahel, a totally underdeveloped region linking North Africa with sub-Saharan Africa, which has been grappling for over a decade with jihadists taking over parts of their territories, repeated military coups, state failure, massive corruption, poverty, climate change, as well as extraordinary population growth rates. The Sahel used to be firmly allied to Europe and France, but is now working closely with Russia, whose mercenaries have stirred up more migration towards the European Union (EU).

Russian military transport planes used to land at African airports such as Bamako in the middle of the night, while Moscow consistently denied any involvement with the shadowy Wagner Group. Only since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the death of Wagner co-founder, Yevgeni Prigozhin the following year, has Moscow acknowledged the presence of mercenaries and made them a new force, part of the Russian state, under the name of Africa Corps. Officially tasked to help the West African country of Mali fight jihadists, they have, in fact, only worsened the security situation as their brutality against civilians has been matched with a recruitment program for jihadists offering protection for villagers.

## EUROPE'S SOUTHERN SHORE

How did we get there? After all, France had sent soldiers in 2013 to liberate the north of Mali from jihadists who had set up a caliphate-like entity there, implementing corporal punishments such as cutting off the hands of thieves. Yet the jihadists were not defeated. They just fled to the mountains in the desert in the north and were quickly back to exploit Mali's failure to offer to citizens public services and a way out of poverty. These had been precisely the root causes why jihadists with their extreme views had been thriving by setting up parallel state authorities such as schools or courts in the countryside, where the Malian state is absent.

The Sahel is one of the world's poorest regions, with Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso falling in the category of the ten least developed countries. Governments, since their independence from France in 1960, have failed their citizens, never having developed the countryside and concentrating wealth and power in their capitals, where corruption is rife. Since elections have mostly produced corrupt and incompetent governments, the region has also been rife with military coups, with officers taking power in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso since 2020.

The three countries also boast some of the highest population growth rates, with women in Niger having seven children on average. To make matters even worse, the Sahel is a region disproportionately affected by climate change, with farmers facing either severe drought or extreme floods, as was the case last year, when crops were lost. Competition with cattle herders over access to water and land has been growing due to demographic and climatic pressures, with the losers, in the absence of a state authority, joining jihadists offering justice. That has helped jihadists linked to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State to take over large swaths of Mali and Burkina Faso (to a lesser extent also Niger). To Europeans, their punishments under Islamic law sound draconic, but many in the region prefer going to an Islamic court to settle differences, because judges do not base rulings on the amount of money they have been paid, like in state courtrooms.

Why does this matter for the European Union? The Sahel is situated in Europe's south, with two main migration routes from sub-Sahara Africa to Europe passing through it. One stretches from Niger on the land route through the desert to Libya (to take a boat to Italy), and the other from Mauritania by boat via the Western Atlantic to Spain's Canary Islands. That makes Europe very vulnerable. The Sahel countries may be some of the world's poorest, but they can influence a toxic migration debate in Europe and give a boost to the far-right by allowing more migrants to pass through their territories – that is why Russia has been keen to get a foothold in the region, which is often neglected by EU policy makers.

There has been a misconception that Wagner and Russia have come to the Sahel to extract gold to make huge profits. Companies linked to Wagner did export gold, diamonds, and other resources from the Central African Republic, yet another impoverished African nation mired in conflict. But Russia's engagement in the Sahel is not about making money – Moscow wants to make friends in Europe's underbelly to shape narratives, overcome isolation because of the Ukraine war, and, more importantly, undermine the EU by triggering new migration flows. Russia has no gold mine in Mali. Moscow sees the Sahel as a strategic investment to harm the EU in a new Cold War front.

## FRANCE'S EXIT

How has Russia been able to make inroads in the Sahel? Traditionally, the Sahel countries have been close to Europe and especially to the former colonial power France. But long before the current security crisis started, there had been a strong anti-French sentiment across the Sahel despite Paris' military intervention, which reconquered northern Mali in 2013. In the eyes of many locals, France had sought for too long to keep influence in the Sahel and its other former colonies in Africa, treating them as its backyard where Paris would seemingly intervene in domestic politics at will.

Sahelians did not necessarily want to break completely with France, but to diversify their partnerships, which was often unacceptable for French policy makers, hence an adjustment of the relationship has been overdue. Russia has been very skilled in exploiting the wish of peoples and governments in the region to depend less on France. Several years before the first Wagner mercenaries arrived in December 2021, Moscow set up a sophisticated disinformation campaign, working with local "influencers" on social media to whip up sentiment against the West and present Russia as an allegedly credible alternative without a colonial past in Africa. European policy makers dismissed the absurd claims made by pro-Russian social media "influencers", such as that Paris was arming jihadists, but many people in the region believed them amid a widespread anti-French sentiment.

With relations between France and Mali souring after a second military coup in 2021 and the West's abrupt departure from Afghanistan the same year, Bamako feared that French and European troops would also quit, leaving the country exposed to the jihadist threat. Russia was then quick to offer Wagner mercenaries to fight jihadists and give political backing to Mali's military government to downgrade ties with France and Europe. It looked as a win-win for both as Russia used the Mali connection to expand from there to neighbors Niger and Burkina Faso, where military leaders were equally willing to work with Moscow in exchange for military support and cut relations with their traditional partners in Europe.

Beyond the military cooperation, Russia also helped with the birth of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) grouping the three military-run countries in a defensive alliance modelled on NATO. The Africa Corps has been deployed to Niger and Burkina Faso to train and equip local forces with a much smaller footprint than Wagner in Mali. The Corps, which belongs to the defense ministry, was formed after Wagner founder Prigozhin fell out in 2023 with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Kremlin first left Wagner operations in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) in place since they were based on Prigozhin's personal relations. Only in June 2025, the Africa Corps managed to take over the Wagner operations in Mali and now plans a similar change in CAR.

## MIGRATION

Predictably, Russia's promise of improving security in Mali and the Sahel has failed. This is no surprise because Wagner had a peak time of around 1,500 mercenaries on the ground in Mali, a third of what France sent as its anti-terrorism force to the Sahel. Wagner's brutality against civilians, who are often labelled as "terrorism supporters", has made the conflict worse with more civilian deaths, pushing survivors of massacres to join jihadists to seek protection from an abusive state and its Russian allies.

From the start, Western diplomats suspected that Russia was seeking with its Sahel engagement to stir up more poverty-migration towards Europe and help that way right-wing allies such as Germany's AfD, sympathetic to Moscow - the more migrants come, the more votes they tend to get. These fears have been confirmed. After a coup in Niger in 2023 the government signed a memorandum of understanding with Russia to boost military cooperation – the day later the junta reopened a major migration route to Libya (and from there to continue by boat to Italy), which had been effectively closed under a deal with the EU in 2015. The new government clearly felt emboldened to break with Europe given the promised support from Russia.

While in Niger Russian influence in rising migration was indirect, it is much more obvious on the second migration route from Mali to Mauritania (and from there by boat to the Canary Islands.) Last year, Malians were among the top three nationalities arriving by boat on the Spanish islands. Numbers are low compared to people arriving on the Balkan route, but there is the potential for huge rises in the near future. More than 110,000 Malians fled last year to Mauretania, languishing in and around a major UN camp on the Mauritanian side of the border.[1] An additional 6,000 refugees have been arriving there every month this year.[2] The author met several refugees from northern Mali during a field visit in April 2025. They all cited the atrocities of Wagner as the reason for their flight. The Russians officially fight jihadists, but do not distinguish between civilians and fighters. "They burn down villages, steal cattle and rape women, while accusing us of supporting terrorists," said one refugee. Most Malian refugees do not want to go to Europe given the dangers of passage via the stormy West Atlantic coast, but some might be forced to do so in the future for lack of alternatives. They cannot go back home due to insecurity, but it is unsure if the UN will be able to continue its aid operation for the refugees due to the cuts of the Trump administration. The US financed up to half of humanitarian aid operations or more there and in other conflict zones in the Sahel.

## RUSSIA'S ENGAGEMENT HAS PEAKED

Despite the success from the Russian perspective of stirring up more migration towards Europe, there are signs that its engagement in the Sahel has peaked and will be reduced. For a start, Moscow has been facing logistical challenges to supply mercenaries, rotate troops and move equipment since the fall of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad in December 2024.

Russia was a major backer of Assad and had helped with a military intervention in 2015 to save his regime, setting up a large operation on the ground, which was also used to supply its mercenary operations in Africa from Sudan to Mali. Syria had under Assad's father already in the 70s granted the Soviet Union a naval base in Tartous on the Mediterranean Coast. In 2015, his son allowed Russia to take over and expand the Khmeimim air base,

[1] Statement by the U.N. refugee agency UNHCR on its website (Mauritanie | HCR)

[2] UNHCR officials gave the author this figure during a field visit in April.

which was turned into a logistical hub for its Syria and also Africa operations – without the airfield, Moscow would have never been able to expand on the continent.

The flight distance from southern Russia to sub-Saharan Africa is too far for transport planes, so when Russia set up the Wagner operations in the Central African Republic, Mali and Sudan, planes stopped at Khmeimim to refuel and load personnel, as well as ammunition. Russia also shipped military goods to its naval base in Tartous to send them on to Wagner operations in Libya and elsewhere, using civilian ships to circumvent limits on military vessels on the Bosporus Straits.

Setting up a mercenary operation in Africa was always a cheap byproduct of an already existing military operation in Syria to support government forces battling rebels since 2011. Since Assad's fall, Russia has gone to great lengths to reach out to the new rulers, sending even fuel and offering financial support to preserve its two Syrian bases, but their future is unclear. Even if Russia can keep them, they won't be as efficient as before, as the large Syrian military operation, from fuel to arms storage, is gone. Much of the material there was shipped to eastern Libya, where Russia has been courting military ruler Khalifa Haftar.

Since 2019, Wagner has been active in eastern Libya backing Haftar. Russia has since used four air bases in eastern Libya to support its African operations, though Syria was more important given the Russian military presence there. Russia has been in recent months, building up a new hub at a remote air base in southern Libya, but needs to invest in infrastructure. There have also been some flights from Khmeimim to Africa, but the main transit hub is now Libya. Yet, the switch to the North African country carries risks as Haftar is 81 years old, controlling only half of the territory in a fragmented country mired in conflict since the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Russia is in Libya also much more visible than in Syria, which was under Assad a black box for Westerners. In addition, Haftar also has ties to Western countries and enjoys a reputation for swapping alliances, so Russia's position in Libya is less secure than it was under Assad.

## WAKE-UP CALL FOR EUROPE

Moscow has been in talks with the Sudanese government for years to set up a naval base in Port Sudan on the Red Sea to have more logistical options for its African operations. It is unlikely that Sudan will grant this request anytime soon, and it also would be difficult to set up a base in the middle of a civil war. But army chief Abdel-Fattah has been using the prospect of a naval base to extract more weapons from Russia, helping him to regain the capital, Khartoum, from the Rapid Support Force opposing him. That has allowed Russia to expand its engagement in another African conflict zone, with a risk for Europe of more migration. More than four million Sudanese have fled the civil war in Sudan, with some of them trying to go to Libya and Europe, as there is no hope of going back.[3]

The second reason why Russia's engagement in Africa has peaked and will not be growing anymore is the takeover of the Russia Corps of Wagner's operations. The Corps is

[3] Figure cited in UNHCR statement dated June 3, 2025 (Health conditions worsen as displacement from Sudan conflict exceeds 4 million | UNHCR).

an umbrella belonging to the defense ministry, which manages all mercenary operations. Its profile is on training and protection services, such as guarding Libyan oilfields, not on fighting jihadists in open combat. The Corps members resemble soldiers, not Rambo-type fighters such as Prigozhin's Wagner fighters. With the Africa Corps now officially in charge, it is no longer possible for Moscow to deny what Russians are doing in Mali and the Sahel – it is a Russian military operation. Therefore, the Corps will be taking fewer risks, such as fighting (and risking casualties) and doing more mundane tasks such as training or flying helicopters, requiring fewer personnel on the ground. But with a focus on training, Russia faces tough competition from other countries such as Turkey, which has better arms for African guerrilla warfare, such as drones. Russia recently shipped tanks from 1972, highlighting the strain of the Ukraine war to send more modern weapons.

From a Russian perspective, scaling back its Africa activities does not signal defeat – Moscow has accomplished its goals in the Sahel. Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and even Chad, another Sahel country once close to France, have ended military cooperation with the former colonial power and cut ties to Europe and the USA. Russia's disinformation and soft power campaign have been very successful in the three countries, where the overwhelmingly young population gets its news from social media playing on anti-French feelings – many people in the Sahel have a positive image of Russia, a country they do not know anything about and which has not provided development or humanitarian aid like Europe, which is still financing foreign assistance for free. In contrast, Russia asks for payment for its military cooperation. The Kremlin has gotten all it wanted from the Sahel and can reduce its engagement.

Europe needs to wake up and give greater focus to the Sahel, where EU member states have been hiding behind France without producing their own strategy. Paris' time in the region is up, and the rest of the EU needs to take greater responsibility to counter Russian influence in a region that is central to European interests.

# ROMANIA AND BRAZIL: GEOPOLITICAL CONVERGENCES AMID THE FRAGMENTATION OF MULTIPOLARITY

**Roberto Rodolfo Georg Uebel**

**ABSTRACT:** *This article explores the evolving geopolitical relationship between Brazil and Romania within the context of a fragmented multipolar order. Drawing on theories of structural power and critical geography, it analyzes diplomatic, cultural, and economic convergences between the two nations. Emphasis is placed on the potential of bilateral cooperation in trade, energy, and sustainable development, as well as the role of Romania as a strategic interlocutor between Mercosur and the European Union. The study highlights shared Latin identities and the capacity of regional and middle powers to promote inclusive, cross-regional dialogue in an increasingly complex global landscape.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Brazil; Romania; multipolarity; Mercosur–EU relations; Latin identity*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: BRAZIL AND ROMANIA AT THE GEOPOLITICAL CROSSROADS

In a world increasingly marked by overlapping crises, geopolitical fragmentation, and the erosion of established global hierarchies, the strategic trajectories of Brazil and Romania invite renewed scholarly attention. Both countries, albeit situated in different hemispheres and institutional frameworks, possess attributes that render them key interlocutors in the emerging landscape of global multipolarity. This article seeks to analyze the convergences between Brazil and Romania, exploring how their respective geopolitical positions, cultural identities, and economic strategies intersect within a global order in flux.

Romania, at the eastern frontier of the European Union, plays a nuanced role in European and transatlantic geopolitics. With its historical entanglements in Central and Eastern Europe, the Black Sea region, and its Latin linguistic and cultural heritage, Romania embodies a hybridity that transcends conventional geopolitical binaries. It is simultaneously a periphery (Cardoso & Faletto, 2004) and a bridge - between East and West, and between North and South. Brazil, by contrast, has emerged as a quintessential actor of the Global South. Its engagement with multilateral forums such as BRICS, the G20, and Mercosur underscores a strategic ambition to project influence beyond regional confines and to reshape global governance norms.

This article aims to interrogate the evolving relationship between Brazil and Romania by addressing three interlinked questions:

1. How do Brazil and Romania position themselves within a fragmented multipolar order?
2. What are the cultural, diplomatic and economic affinities that sustain or could sustain closer cooperation?
3. How might the EU-Mercosur agreement serve as a catalyst for bilateral and interregional collaboration?

In addressing these questions, we adopt a multidimensional approach that draws from both critical geopolitical theory and political economy.

### 1.1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical anchoring of this study relies primarily on two complementary yet distinct perspectives on globalization and power: Susan Strange's structural power theory and Milton Santos' critical geography of globalization. These frameworks enable us to transcend purely state-centric or institutional readings of international relations, and instead attend to the deeper forces that shape the capacities of states to act in the international system.

Susan Strange (1996), in her seminal work *The Retreat of the State*, redefines the locus of power in international affairs by identifying four key structures - production, finance, knowledge, and security - that govern the behavior of both state and non-state actors. For Strange, globalization is not merely a process of integration, but a redistribution of power, often to the detriment of states. In this sense, both Brazil and Romania must be understood not only through their formal geopolitical alignments but also through their structural positions within these four domains. Brazil's natural resources, scientific capabilities, and strategic leadership in the Global South may give it leverage in certain domains (e.g., production and knowledge), whereas Romania's integration into European networks (e.g., finance and security) offers different forms of structural insertion. However, both remain vulnerable to asymmetries imposed by dominant global powers and economic centres.

Milton Santos (2005), on the other hand, offers a territorial and humanistic critique of globalization. He argues that globalization, while nominally universal, produces highly uneven spatial outcomes, reinforcing hierarchies between central and peripheral regions. His notion of the "used territory" (*território usado*) allows us to understand how global dynamics are materialised and contested at the local and national levels. From this perspective, the strategies of Brazil and Romania cannot be reduced to macroeconomic indicators or institutional memberships alone - they are embedded in historically contingent geographies of development, dependence, and resistance. Romania's post-socialist integration into European capitalism system and Brazil's neo-developmentalist oscillations under successive governments illustrate the differentiated experience of globalization, which Santos urges us to analyze from the "South" of the world system.

By combining Strange's and Santos' insights, this article proposes a relational reading of Brazil–Romania interactions that foregrounds both structural constraints and spatial imaginaries. This allows us to see convergence not only in terms of policy alignment but also in shared vulnerabilities and aspirations within an increasingly fragmented and contested world order.

### 1.2. Methodological Approach

The article adopts a qualitative, comparative and interpretive methodology grounded in geopolitical analysis and critical political economy. This research is based on the integration of three primary sources:

1. official documents and policy papers issued by the foreign ministries of Brazil and Romania, the European Union, and Mercosur;

2. speeches, interviews, and public statements by political leaders and diplomats from both countries, especially in multilateral forums such as BRICS summits, EU–Mercosur negotiations, and regional cooperation platforms;
3. academic literature and secondary sources on international relations, comparative diplomacy, regional integration, and global political economy.

We also draw on recent trade and investment data to map the evolution of Brazil-Romania economic relations, focusing on strategic sectors such as energy, agriculture, infrastructure, and technology. Additionally, content analysis is applied to key cultural and diplomatic initiatives to identify patterns of soft power engagement and discursive affinities rooted in shared Latin heritage.

Temporal scope is set between 2000 and 2025, covering the period of Romania's EU accession (2007), Brazil's peak diplomatic activism (2003-2015), the advancement of the EU-Mercosur agreement (especially post-2024), and the recent geopolitical disruptions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, and the fragmentation of multilateralism proposed by the Trump administration, which will reshape the international regimes. Spatially, the focus lies on the bilateral dimension of Brazil–Romania relations, but always framed within the broader regional dynamics of South America, the European Union, and the Global South.

The comparative angle is employed not to establish symmetry between Brazil and Romania - given their asymmetrical capacities - but to identify points of articulation and potential for strategic convergence. These include, for instance, shared interests in diversifying trade partnerships, developing green energy corridors, engaging in cultural diplomacy, and advocating for multilateral reforms.

Finally, the interpretive dimension of the analysis is attentive to symbolic and narrative constructions of identity and belonging. The invocation of "latinity", for example, is not merely a linguistic fact but a political metaphor for building affinity across continents. This symbolic register is particularly important for Romania's aspiration to deepen ties with Latin America, and for Brazil's pursuit of diversified partnerships beyond the traditional North–South axis.

### 1.3. The Significance of the Brazil–Romania Axis

Despite the relatively low profile of Brazil-Romania relations in mainstream diplomatic narratives, this dyad holds significant potential considering global systemic transformations. As the liberal international order faces multiple crises - ranging from climate change to supply chain fragilities, from great power rivalry to normative contestations - the search for new coalitions and regional or middle-power diplomacy becomes increasingly relevant.

Brazil's leadership within BRICS and Romania's embeddedness in the European Union are not necessarily antagonistic trajectories. On the contrary, they could offer complementary access points to two major regional blocs - Mercosur and the EU - whose interregional dialogue remains underdeveloped. Moreover, both countries have demonstrated a capacity to work under complex multilateral environments while retaining degrees of policy autonomy. This makes them suitable candidates for articulating initiatives that promote South-North dialogue, sustainable development, and inclusive global governance.

Furthermore, the concept of "fragmented multipolarity", which this article adopts as a heuristic device, refers to the proliferation of power centers without the consolidation of coherent norms or institutions to mediate global order. In such a scenario, the capacity of states to forge flexible, cross-regional alliances becomes a critical strategic asset. Brazil and Romania - precisely because of their peripheral yet connected status - can contribute to a pluralistic international architecture that resists binary Cold War logics and hegemonic impositions.

As the article unfolds, we shall examine in greater detail how BRICS (Section 2), shared Latin identity and cultural diplomacy (Section 3), bilateral trade and innovation (Section 4), and the EU-Mercosur agreement (throughout) can serve as entry points for enhanced Brazil–Romania cooperation. The final section (Section 5) will offer forward-looking reflections on how these synergies might be institutionalized or expanded in the context of a world in transition.

## 2. BRICS AND MULTIPOLARITY: THE GLOBAL POSITIONING OF ROMANIA AND BRAZIL

In an increasingly complex and contested global order, the concept of multipolarity has gained renewed analytical and political relevance. This section explores how the BRICS bloc operates as a geopolitical alternative to Western-led (or USA-led) institutions and examines the distinct yet interconnected trajectories of Brazil and Romania within this fragmented multipolar landscape. While Brazil stands as a central actor within the BRICS, actively shaping discourses on global governance and South-South cooperation, Romania advocates for a more nuanced position, anchored in its Euro-Atlantic commitments while seeking diversified partnerships beyond the West. By analyzing the strategic choices, external alignments, and opportunities for bilateral cooperation between these two countries, this section offers insights into how emerging and middle powers respond to the shifting geographies of global influence.

### 2.1. BRICS as an Alternative Bloc to the Western Order: Brazil's Role as a Global Broker

The BRICS bloc[1] - comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa - has increasingly asserted itself as a counterweight to the USA-led international order historically shaped by Western powers. This multipolar configuration, while fragmented, offers a platform for emerging economies to redefine the contours of global governance and redistribute geopolitical agency. Brazil, in particular, has stood out within the BRICS for its unique role as a broker between North and South, East and West, and for its capacity to mediate among disparate interests in multilateral forums.

As Neil Brenner (2019) argues in his exploration of territorial restructuring and uneven development, emerging powers like Brazil possess both the geographical scale and

[1] The new BRICS members are Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, joining in January 2024. This expansion marked the group's first enlargement since 2010.

institutional ambition to influence global flows of capital, governance, and ideas. Brazil's proactive engagement in the BRICS+ dialogues, participation in the New Development Bank (NDB), and advocacy for global governance reforms (e.g., in the United Nations Security Council and IMF quota reviews) are emblematic of this repositioning. Far from being a passive beneficiary of multipolarity, Brazil has actively contributed to its construction through a diplomacy rooted in principles of multilateralism, South-South cooperation, and non-intervention.

Moreover, Brazil's foreign policy underlines a pragmatic multilateralism, strategically navigating its alignment with both Western institutions (such as the OECD and G20) and alternative platforms like BRICS. This dual insertion enables Brazil to exercise strategic flexibility, leveraging its partnerships to gain political capital, diversify its economic alliances, and contribute to the recalibration of global power dynamics.

### 2.2. Romania's Geopolitical Positioning and Its Engagement with BRICS Powers

While not a member of the BRICS, Romania's geopolitical relevance in the current era of fragmented multipolarity cannot be underestimated. Situated at the crossroads of Eastern and Western Europe, and historically embedded in complex power struggles, Romania has cultivated a foreign policy of strategic alignment with Euro-Atlantic institutions - particularly NATO and the European Union - while simultaneously seeking diversified partnerships beyond its immediate regional scope.

As Doreen Massey (2005) articulates in her conceptualization of global sense of place, national positioning in the international system is constituted not only by physical location but also by relational geographies, shaped by historical, political, and economic interactions. Romania's engagements with BRICS powers - particularly China and Russia - reflect this spatial relationality. Despite a cooling of relations with Russia due to NATO obligations and the war in Ukraine, Romania has shown openness to economic ties with China through the now-dormant 17+1 cooperation format. Furthermore, its growing trade relations with India and Brazil suggest a latent potential for reconfiguring its global partnerships in a more pluralistic direction.

Romania's engagement with Brazil, for instance, is underpinned by shared interests in energy cooperation, agricultural technology exchange, and cultural diplomacy. These interactions, though peripheral compared to core EU relationships, exemplify Romania's attempt to assert its agency within an evolving global system that increasingly values diversified partnerships and functional multilateralism.

### 2.3. The Challenges of Fragmented Multipolarity: Foreign Policy Impacts on Romania and Brazil

Fragmented multipolarity is characterized by a decentralization of global power without a coherent hegemonic substitute for the former order. As Saskia Sassen (2014) notes, the global architecture is increasingly marked by overlapping sovereignties, fragmented jurisdictions, and networked asymmetries. In this context, both Brazil and Romania face the challenge of balancing their national interests with the competing demands of a fragmented, competitive, and uncertain international system.

For Brazil, the multipolar world provides both opportunity and constraint. On the one hand, Brazil can capitalize on the relative decline of U.S. unipolarity to advance its leadership within the Global South, build coalitions with like-minded states, and shape international norms. On the other hand, internal political instability, economic volatility, and environmental pressures - exacerbated by global climate politics - undermine Brazil's ability to sustain consistent foreign policy engagement.

Romania, by contrast, faces the dual pressure of aligning with NATO and EU strategic objectives while preserving a degree of autonomy to pursue non-Western partnerships. The Ukraine war, NATO expansion, and rising tensions with Russia place Romania at the frontline of a re-securitised Europe. In this climate, engagement with BRICS states becomes diplomatically delicate, especially as these countries diverge in their positions on Western sanctions and the international security architecture.

Both states thus experience a tension between structural positioning and strategic autonomy. Their foreign policies reflect attempts to navigate the dialectic between integration and independence, between allegiance to dominant blocs and the pursuit of diversified, interest-based diplomacy. This dialectic is especially pronounced in contexts such as UN reform, climate negotiations, and digital governance, where Brazil and Romania must align their national interests with shifting global alliances.

### 2.4. Brazil-Romania Cooperation Opportunities in a Reconfigured International Order

Despite their asymmetrical positions in the global hierarchy, Brazil and Romania share several complementary interests that could be leveraged to enhance bilateral cooperation in the context of a fragmented multipolarity. These opportunities span several dimensions:

*(i) Science, Technology, and Innovation*

Brazil's capacity in bioenergy, aerospace, and tropical agricultural technology could complement Romania's expertise in nuclear energy, engineering, and digital technologies. Joint ventures in clean energy development, smart agriculture, and AI-driven industrial innovation could serve as pillars of a forward-looking cooperation agenda.

*(ii) Multilateral Governance and Normative Dialogue*

Both countries are committed to a rules-based international order, albeit interpreted through different regional lenses. Brazil, with its advocacy for South-South cooperation and global governance reform, and Romania, with its focus on Euro-Atlantic integration and democratic resilience, can find common ground in forums such as the UN, WTO, and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), particularly in promoting equitable digital governance and sustainable development frameworks.

*(iii) Academic and Cultural Exchange*

Given their mutual interest in fostering soft power and promoting pluricultural engagement, Brazil and Romania could enhance university partnerships, research funding schemes, and exchange programs. In the realm of higher education and diplomacy, such collaborations may serve as tools for strategic positioning and cognitive convergence in a fragmented global context.

*(iv) Strategic Dialogue on Global Risk and Resilience*

The current geopolitical context - marked by systemic risks such as climate change, cyber insecurity, health crises, and food insecurity - necessitates coordinated responses. Brazil and Romania can develop joint research initiatives and resilience policies, informed by scenario planning and risk analytics, to enhance their anticipatory governance capabilities in an era of uncertainty.

These domains suggest that the reconfiguration of global power opens not only geopolitical fissures but also windows for cross-continental cooperation. In this respect, the concept of "geopolitical complementarities" becomes crucial: the ability of geographically and politically distinct actors to align their capacities in pursuit of shared objectives without erasing their differences.

The emergence of BRICS as a normative and institutional alternative to the Western order has had profound implications for the articulation of global power and the strategic positioning of both core and peripheral states. Brazil, as a foundational member of the BRICS, continues to embody the dual aspiration of South-South solidarity and global governance transformation. Romania, while operating from a different structural position, navigates the same fragmented terrain, seeking to maintain agency and influence in a world of overlapping orders and competing centres of gravity.

The 19 bilateral agreements between Brazil and Romania *(Table 1)* reveal a consistent diplomatic effort to expand cooperation across economic, technological, cultural, and judicial domains. These accords, signed over the past two decades, demonstrate not only mutual interest but also a long-term vision for enhancing strategic dialogue beyond the limits of their respective regional affiliations. The recurring emphasis on legal ratification and the successful conclusion of internal procedures on both sides highlight the political will to anchor this partnership within a formal institutional framework.

***Table 1* – List of Agreements in Force between Brazil and Romania**

| Title of the Agreement | Other Party | Subjects | Date of Signature | Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treaty between the Federative Republic of Brazil and Romania on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters | Romania | Criminal Law | 13/06/2017 | In Force |
| Memorandum of Understanding between the Rio Branco Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Romanian Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania on Mutual Cooperation for the Training of Diplomats | Romania | Diplomatic Academies, Diplomatic Consultations | 05/10/2012 | In Force |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agreement on Economic and Technological Cooperation between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of Romania | Romania | Scientific and Techno-logical Coo-peration | 28/05/2010 | In Force |
| Agreement between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of Romania on the Exercise of Remunerated Activities by Dependants of Members of Diplomatic Missions and Consular Posts | Romania | Dependants – Remune-rated Activi-ties | 28/05/2010 | In Force |
| Agreement between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of Romania on Partial Visa Waiver | Romania | Visas and Immigration | 16/10/2004 | In Force |
| Extradition Treaty between the Federative Republic of Brazil and Romania | Romania | Extradition | 12/08/2003 | In Force |
| Agreement between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of Romania on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism | Romania | Tourism, Fairs and Exhibitions | 25/07/2000 | In Force |
| Agreement between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of Romania on Cooperation in Combating the Illicit Production and Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, Drug Abuse and Addiction | Romania | Narcotics | 22/10/1999 | In Force |
| Agreement by Exchange of Notes between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of Romania on the Establishment of Consulates-General in Both Countries | Romania | Diplomatic and Consu-lar Relations | 11/05/1994 | In Force |

| Title of the Agreement | Other Party | Subjects | Date of Signature | Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of a Consultation Mechanism between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania | Romania | Diplomatic Consultations | 11/05/1994 | In Force |
| Agreement by Exchange of Notes between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of Romania on the Waiver of Visas for Holders of Diplomatic and Service Passports | Romania | Visas and Immigration | 13/03/1991 | In Force |
| Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of Romania | Romania | Artistic and Cultural Cooperation | 13/03/1991 | In Force |
| Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania | Romania | Scientific and Technological Cooperation | 12/05/1981 | In Force |
| Joint Declaration between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania | Romania | Joint Declaration | 05/06/1975 | In Force |
| Memorandum of Understanding in the Field of Mining between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania | Romania | Natural Resources | 05/06/1975 | In Force |
| Agreement on the Transfer of Technology in the Pharmaceutical Sector between the Government of the Federative | Romania | Health | 05/06/1975 | In Force |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania | | | | |
| Agreement on the Establishment of an Office for Commercial Purposes in Rio de Janeiro between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania | Romania | Diplomatic and Consular Relations | 27/06/1973 | In Force |
| Agreement by Exchange of Notes on the Establishment of a Commercial Legation Office of Romania in the City of São Paulo between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania | Romania | Diplomatic and Consular Relations | 16/12/1969 | In Force |
| Agreement on the Re-establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Government of the United States of Brazil and the Government of the People's Republic of Romania | Romania | Establishment of Diplomatic Relations | 21/03/1961 | In Force |

**Source:** Concórdia System of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil. Available at: https://concordia.itamaraty.gov.br/pesquisa?IdEnvolvido=264&IdVigencia=6&TipoAcordo=BL&page=1&tipoPesquisa=2. Accessed on: 8 April 2025.

Notably, the 2010 *Agreement on Economic and Technological Cooperation* underscores both countries' recognition of each other as potential partners in industrial development and innovation. This agreement establishes a structured platform for technology transfer, investment promotion, and bilateral trade. It reflects Brazil's interest in diversifying its economic partnerships within Europe, while offering Romania access to Latin America's largest market – an asset amid EU-driven economic uncertainty. For instance, the Agreement sets out the priority sectors for Brazil–Romania cooperation, as follows:

- Economic relations shall be developed under this Agreement through the promotion of activities related to the economic and technological sectors.
- Cooperation shall encourage the development of business contacts between companies from both countries, the mutual exchange of information on applicable legislation, and the identification of specific projects and sectors of potential interest for collaboration, in the areas listed below:

a) metallurgical industry;

b) mining;

c) oil extraction and refining;

d) automotive industry (cars and auto parts);

e) manufacture of railway wagons;

f) manufacture of aircraft and aircraft components, as well as other relevant fields deemed appropriate by the Contracting Parties (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2010).

The 2017 *Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters* represents a deepening of judicial cooperation, echoing global trends in cross-border crime prevention and information sharing. Such alignment serves both Brazilian and Romanian strategic interests in bolstering institutional transparency, law enforcement collaboration, and rule of law - critical aspects of both countries' international reputations and internal governance agendas.

Cultural diplomacy also plays a significant role, as evidenced by the 2010 *Agreement on Cultural and Educational Cooperation*. Through this accord, both countries committed to supporting academic exchanges, language learning initiatives, and the joint organisation of cultural events. It is particularly significant in the context of soft power, enabling Brazil and Romania to shape mutual perceptions and strengthen transnational societal ties through non-coercive means.

A noteworthy but often overlooked dimension is the 2012 *Memorandum of Understanding* between the Brazilian IPEA and Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This document, although less formal than a treaty, points to a strategic convergence in policy research and institutional learning. It provides the basis for comparative studies on development models, social policies, and geopolitical positioning, aligning with Brazil's identity as a Global South leader and Romania's aspiration to broaden its policy horizon beyond the EU.

Overall, these agreements reveal more than a functional bilateralism; they illustrate a growing diplomatic convergence in a multipolar world where Brazil and Romania seek alternative venues for influence and cooperation. As the global system becomes increasingly fragmented, formalizing interregional ties such as these offers both countries a hedge against strategic uncertainty and a channel for proactive engagement on global challenges.

As this section has demonstrated, the challenges of fragmented multipolarity are matched by novel opportunities for Brazil-Romania engagement. While not yet fully institutionalized, their potential partnership offers a unique lens through which to interpret the evolving geographies of power, identity, and cooperation in the twenty-first century.

In line with Brenner's (2019) notion of "variegated globalization", Massey's (2005) theory of "relational spatialities" and Sassen's (2014) concept of "expulsions" from the global economy, both countries are repositioning themselves within a complex landscape of uneven integration, selective disconnection, and emergent solidarities. This repositioning will be increasingly shaped by their ability to read, interpret, and act upon the fissures and flows of global multipolarity.

## 3. LATINITY AND CULTURAL-COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY: BRAZIL AND ROMANIA AS A LINK BETWEEN MERCOSUR AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The evolving landscape of international relations in the 21st century is shaped not only by hard power considerations, but increasingly by the symbolic and affective dimensions of soft power and cultural affinity. Against the backdrop of a fragmented multipolarity, both Brazil and Romania possess a unique potential to function as cultural and diplomatic bridges between Mercosur and the European Union (EU), particularly through their shared Latin heritage and complementary geopolitical positions. This section explores how their respective Latin identities foster mutual understanding, how cultural and commercial diplomacy enhances bilateral relations, and how Romania's dual Latin and European identity may facilitate negotiations between Mercosur and the EU. The final segment considers the potential implications of the EU-Mercosur agreement for both states within the logic of interconnected global circuits, drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Saskia Sassen, Susan Strange, and Gilles Deleuze.

### 3.1. Latin Legacy and Cultural Proximity

Romania's self-identification as a Latin country in Eastern Europe, despite its Slavic geographical environment, is rooted in its linguistic, cultural, and historical lineage. The Romanian language, a Romance language derived from Latin, forms a foundational element of the country's identity. This civilizational affiliation creates a unique axis of cultural proximity with Brazil, the largest Lusophone country and a prominent representative of Latin America.

The notion of "*Latinidade*" - a shared cultural, linguistic and symbolic framework derived from Roman heritage – enables a cross-continental affinity that transcends traditional geopolitical divisions. In this regard, cultural theorist Gilles Deleuze's (1990) concept of the rhizome is instructive. Rather than viewing identities as hierarchical or binary, the rhizomatic approach suggests a horizontal, non-linear network of affiliations. Romania and Brazil, while situated on opposite ends of the Atlantic and within different institutional frameworks, nevertheless share a non-centralized, dispersed Latin identity that opens paths for affective and discursive connectivity.

This cultural connectivity provides fertile ground for rethinking international relations beyond the state-centric model. As Saskia Sassen (2006) argues in *Territory, Authority, Rights*, globalization reshapes traditional notions of territory and national belonging, allowing subnational and transnational actors to generate new logics of affiliation and representation. Within this fluid global order, shared civilizational values and cultural memory may serve as legitimate sources of diplomatic innovation and legitimacy.

### 3.2. Cultural and Commercial Diplomacy as Instruments of Engagement

In a fragmented and competitive multipolar world, cultural and commercial diplomacy emerge as strategic tools for soft power projection. These forms of diplomacy function through the symbolic exchange of values, artistic expression, educational cooperation, and commercial promotion, reinforcing a nation's attractiveness while also supporting broader economic and political goals.

Brazil and Romania have long engaged in such practices, albeit asymmetrically. Brazil's cultural diplomacy has historically leveraged its musical, culinary, and linguistic appeal to construct a positive international image, particularly in Africa, Lusophone countries, and Latin America (Ribeiro, 2011). Romania, on the other hand, has recently begun to reassert its cultural diplomacy through initiatives like the Romanian Cultural Institute, which promotes Romanian language and culture globally, including in Latin America.

These efforts, when channelled through bilateral and bi-regional platforms, offer meaningful avenues for cooperation. Cultural diplomacy between Brazil and Romania can stimulate not only people-to-people ties, but also the formation of epistemic communities, academic partnerships, and joint creative industries. Such ties also open the door to commercial diplomacy, wherein national branding and cultural familiarity can ease market entry and facilitate negotiations in areas such as agro-industry, pharmaceuticals, green technology, and higher education.

The commercial complementarity between the two countries is particularly significant. Romania, as a member of the EU with access to its single market and regulatory framework, may act as a logistical and regulatory entry point for Brazilian firms into Europe. Conversely, Brazil, as a major player in Mercosur, offers Romanian enterprises a foothold in South American markets. This potential for reciprocal commercial access underscores the relevance of Susan Strange's (1996) insights in *The Retreat of the State*, where she highlights how markets and non-state actors increasingly assume roles traditionally ascribed to states. Cultural and commercial diplomacy, in this light, become mediating mechanisms for transnational flows of capital, identity, and legitimacy.

### 3.3. Romania's Latin-European Identity and the EU-Mercosur Nexus

The EU-Mercosur partnership has been subject to complex and protracted negotiations, often hindered by concerns over environmental standards, agricultural protectionism, and regulatory asymmetries. Nonetheless, the convergence of Brazil and Romania - two Latin countries within their respective blocs - provides a unique symbolic and diplomatic bridge that may contribute to reinvigorating bi-regional relations.

Romania's identity as both Latin and European enables it to operate in what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might call an "in-between" space. This dual positionality allows Romania to simultaneously participate in the EU's institutional structures while maintaining symbolic affinity with Latin American nations. Such hybridity is not a liability but a diplomatic asset. As Sassen (2014) notes, the global order is increasingly defined by overlapping jurisdictions and multiple affiliations, which can empower actors that navigate across different normative and institutional landscapes.

Romania, often marginalized within intra-EU core-periphery dynamics, may also view its engagement with Mercosur as a platform for projecting influence and differentiating its foreign policy. Similarly, Brazil, facing contestation over its role in global governance and environmental policy, may benefit from engaging with newer EU member states like Romania that can serve as "cultural translators" within Brussels. These dynamics align with Strange's (1996) emphasis on the "structural power" of information, ideology, and production systems, suggesting that Romania's Latin identity may be leveraged strategically within EU debates over trade with Mercosur. Moreover, bilateral initiatives - such as high-level diplomatic visits, trade missions, cultural exchanges, and cooperation through institutions like the EU-LAC Foundation - could be reinforced by the cultural familiarity and discursive resonance afforded by shared Latin heritage. The strategic deployment of this identity is not essentialist but performative, as Deleuze would argue, enacted in specific moments and through institutional practices that reshape the terrain of international relations.

### 3.4. The EU-Mercosur Agreement: Implications for Brazil and Romania

The EU-Mercosur agreement, signed in December 2024, would establish one of the world's largest free trade areas, encompassing over 700 million people and covering diverse sectors such as agriculture, industrial products, services, and public procurement. While the agreement promises broad economic benefits, its implementation remains controversial and politically sensitive. Although the agreement was signed in December 2024 by both parties - the European Union and Mercosur - it still requires ratification by the national parliaments, the European Parliament, and Parlasur in order to enter into force. In countries across both blocs, there remains considerable resistance from specific sectors, despite the agreement currently standing as one of the most effective safeguards - for both Europeans and Mercosur countries - against the effects of the aggressive tariff policies pursued by the Trump administration in the United States.

For Brazil, the agreement represents an opportunity to expand exports of agricultural goods, enhance regulatory convergence, and access new sources of investment. Yet, it also entails challenges related to compliance with EU environmental and labor standards. The Brazilian government has increasingly sought to reposition itself as a credible partner on climate and sustainability, particularly following international criticism during the Bolsonaro administration. The Lula government's renewed multilateralist approach may find in countries like Romania a valuable interlocutor capable of balancing EU concerns with Latin American realities.

From Romania's perspective, the agreement could diversify its trade portfolio and enhance its geopolitical visibility within the EU. As a country with a relatively limited profile in Latin America, Romania may capitalize on the agreement to forge new trade links, educational partnerships, and technological cooperation projects with Brazil and other Mercosur members. It may also contribute to EU internal consensus-building by mediating between more protectionist Western European states and the Commission's liberalizing agenda.

In this regard, Sassen's (2005) work on global assemblages is particularly relevant. The EU-Mercosur deal is not merely an economic arrangement but a complex assemblage of political, legal, cultural and environmental components. The success of such assemblages depends not only on state-to-state negotiations but also on the entanglement of multiple actors - including businesses, NGOs, regional governments, and epistemic communities.

Romania and Brazil, through their shared Latin heritage and commitment to multilateralism, are well-placed to influence these assemblages constructively. Whether through facilitating mutual understanding, co-sponsoring technical workshops, or enhancing civil society dialogue, the bilateral axis can support a more inclusive and sustainable implementation of the agreement.

In an era of fragmented multipolarity, the strategic convergence of Brazil and Romania offers an overlooked but promising avenue for reconfiguring bi-regional relations between Mercosur and the European Union. Their shared Latin identity - understood not as a fixed essence but as a performative and strategic resource - provides a unique framework for cultural and commercial diplomacy. Romania's Latin-European positionality enables it to act as a symbolic and institutional bridge, while Brazil's regional leadership and economic weight lend credibility to such an axis.

By drawing on the theories of Sassen, Strange, and Deleuze, this section has argued that the diplomatic and economic potential of Brazil-Romania cooperation lies not only in material interests but also in the capacity to mediate symbolic imaginaries, regulatory frameworks, and structural asymmetries. As global governance becomes increasingly complex and interdependent, such hybrid actors and affective affinities may well play an outsized role in shaping the future of interregional cooperation.

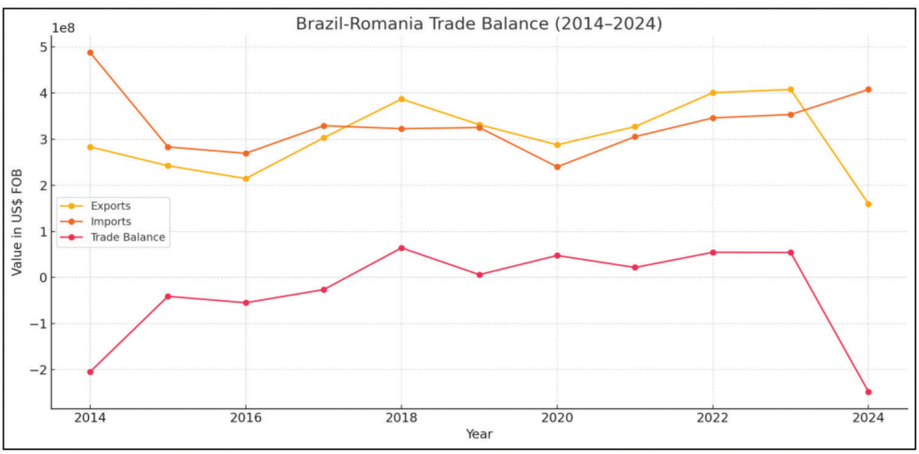
## 4. TRADE, COOPERATION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: BILATERAL OPPORTUNITIES

In the contemporary geopolitical landscape marked by fragmented multipolarity, bilateral relations between regional players such as Brazil and Romania present valuable yet underexplored opportunities for trade, innovation, and sustainable development. This section delves into the evolving commercial dynamics between the two countries, strategic sectors for cooperation, and the transformative potential of renewable energy, scientific exchange, and multilateral agreements, particularly within the European Union (EU) and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur).

### 4.1. Brazil-Romania Trade: Strategic Sectors and Growth Prospects

An analysis of the trade balance between Brazil and Romania from 2014 to 2024 reveals a dynamic but asymmetric commercial relationship. According to official trade statistics, Brazilian exports to Romania consistently exceeded imports, especially from 2018 onward. For instance, in 2018, Brazil exported approximately US$ 386.9 million to Romania, while imports totalled US$ 322.7 million, resulting in a trade surplus of US$ 64.2 million. The trend intensified in 2020, when exports peaked at US$ 408.5 million compared to US$ 198.5 million in imports. In 2023 and 2024, Brazil maintained surpluses of US$ 80.2 million and US$ 107.6 million, respectively, indicating a consolidated and favorable trade pattern for Brazil.

**Figure 1 – Annual trade flows between Brazil and Romania (2014-2024), showing exports, imports, and resulting trade balance in millions of US dollars (FOB)**




**Source/Author (2025):** *Brazil-Romania trade balance (2014–2024) [Graph].*
Based on data from Comex Stat - Ministério do Desenvolvimento, Indústria, Comércio e Serviços.
Retrieved April 10, 2025, from https://comexstat.mdic.gov.br/pt/geral/123516

*Figure 1* illustrates a trend of increasing exports from Brazil and a generally positive trade balance over the period. From a qualitative perspective, Brazil's exports have primarily concentrated on a few strategic sectors. Agricultural products such as unroasted coffee beans, soy-based residues, and tobacco have dominated, reflecting Brazil's comparative advantage in agribusiness. For instance, in 2024, exports of soybean oilcake and residues alone represented more than US$ 25 million. Coffee exports reached US$ 20.6 million, and tobacco accounted for US$ 16.7 million. These figures illustrate Brazil's position as a reliable provider of high-volume, low-value-added commodities.

In contrast, Romanian exports to Brazil have been more modest and diversified within the industrial sector. Romania's potential in areas such as transport equipment, electronics, and machinery remains underutilized in this bilateral relationship. Despite its EU membership and industrial capabilities, Romania has not yet fully capitalized on this strategic partnership.

Blanchard (2017) argues that trade surpluses and deficits in emerging economies often reflect underlying comparative advantages, institutional frameworks, and historical trade patterns. In the case of Brazil-Romania, Brazil's surplus stems from its competitiveness in agribusiness and raw materials, whereas Romania, despite its EU membership and industrial potential, has not yet fully leveraged its position as a gateway to European markets for Latin American partners.

Nevertheless, several sectors stand out as promising for mutual growth. Brazil's increasing technological sophistication in agritech, biotech, and clean energy complements Romania's emerging profile in information technology, automotive components, and renewable energy infrastructure. There is ample room to expand from a predominantly commodities-based relationship to one that incorporates higher value-added exchanges.

### 4.2. Renewable Energy, Technological Innovation, and Scientific Cooperation as Vectors of Integration

One of the most compelling domains for bilateral cooperation lies in the renewable energy sector. Brazil, with its globally recognized leadership in hydropower and biofuels, and Romania, with its growing investments in wind and solar energy - particularly in the Black Sea region - share aligned strategic interests in the energy transition. Technological collaboration could include the co-development of green hydrogen technologies, battery storage systems, and smart grids.

Furthermore, joint research initiatives through bilateral scientific cooperation agreements or multilateral frameworks such as *Horizon Europe* and the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) could stimulate innovation. These programs should prioritise climate-resilient agriculture, bioeconomy, and digitalization in energy and infrastructure sectors.

According to Blanchard (2017), long-term economic growth hinges on productivity gains derived from innovation and knowledge spillovers. The Brazil-Romania relationship must evolve beyond traditional trade into a knowledge-based partnership capable of fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

The potential for innovation-led integration is enhanced by Romania's academic and industrial ecosystems, particularly in cities such as Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest, which host tech hubs and start-up accelerators. Similarly, Brazil's innovation clusters in Porto Alegre, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro offer fertile ground for academic exchanges, research fellowships, and industrial co-development initiatives.

### 4.3. Agriculture, infrastructure, and sustainable trade under the EU-Mercosur Agreement

The provisional agreement between the EU and Mercosur, though not yet ratified by its members, provides a crucial backdrop for understanding the future of Brazil-Romania trade relations. If ratified, the agreement will reduce tariffs, harmonize standards, and foster investment in key areas such as agriculture, infrastructure, and services. Romania, as an EU member state, could play a pivotal role in shaping this agenda.

From an agricultural standpoint, Brazil stands to benefit from improved access to European markets for its processed and certified agricultural goods, provided it meets sustainability benchmarks and phytosanitary standards. Romania's expertise in agrarian technology and food processing could complement this dynamic, enabling joint ventures and knowledge transfers.

In the domain of infrastructure, the EU-Mercosur agreement could facilitate Romanian investments in Brazilian logistics corridors, ports, and railway systems. Conversely, Brazilian firms with experience in large-scale engineering and renewable energy infrastructure could find investment opportunities in Romania's ongoing modernization of transport and energy grids, particularly under the EU Green Deal and Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Trade under this agreement must also be sustainable. Echoing Blanchard's (2017) concerns on the externalities of trade liberalization, both Brazil and Romania must ensure that economic openness is accompanied by regulatory frameworks that protect labor rights, preserve ecosystems, and enhance resilience to global shocks such as climate change and pandemics.

### 4.4. Romania as a Strategic Interlocutor within the European Union

Romania's role as a member of the EU positions it as a valuable interlocutor for Brazil within the complex institutional architecture of the Union. Given the evolving nature of EU foreign trade policy, Romania could advocate for more balanced and diversified engagement with Latin America, in particular with Brazil as a strategic partner.

This role could be exercised through Romania's participation in EU committees, bilateral embassies, and regional initiatives such as the Three Seas Initiative, which aligns infrastructural development with strategic autonomy. Moreover, Romania could promote knowledge exchanges and interparliamentary dialogues that elevate Latin America on the EU's external action agenda.

Blanchard and Leigh (2013) emphasize the importance of institutions in shaping macroeconomic outcomes. Romania's active positioning within EU institutions could facilitate the removal of non-tariff barriers and reinforce the implementation of sustainability clauses in trade agreements with Brazil. It could also serve as a political bridge amid the contentious debates over environmental protection and development in Mercosur-EU relations.

In sum, the commercial and developmental relationship between Brazil and Romania is ripe with opportunities. By aligning their trade agendas with innovation, sustainability, and multilateral frameworks, both countries can deepen their integration and serve as exemplars of strategic cooperation in a fragmented world order.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the face of increasing global fragmentation, the trajectories of Brazil and Romania underscore the enduring importance of intermediary powers in shaping plural, cross-regional alliances. While distinct in geographic location and institutional embeddedness, both countries operate from positions that allow for flexible diplomatic engagement, normative innovation, and pragmatic coalition-building in an international order defined less by hierarchy than by intersecting networks and competing centres of gravity.

Brazil, as a leader of the Global South and a core member of the BRICS, has demonstrated agency in reformulating the logics of global governance. Its assertive role in multilateral fora, emphasis on inclusive development, and commitment to sovereignty-based diplomacy position it as a critical voice in contemporary debates on trade, sustainability, and global security. Romania, while situated within the Euro-Atlantic institutional fabric, brings a peripheral sensibility, in geoeconomic terms, and a Latin-European identity that allows it to interpret and mediate external narratives with agility and nuance.

In this context, Brazil and Romania are uniquely equipped to advance a cooperative agenda grounded in mutual respect and strategic complementarity. To fully harness this potential, several forward-looking recommendations merit consideration. First, both countries should institutionalize high-level bilateral mechanisms - including strategic dialogues and parliamentary forums - that go beyond trade and incorporate digital governance, climate diplomacy, and educational cooperation. Secondly, they should coordinate positions within multilateral organizations, particularly in the context of UN reform, WTO negotiations, and environmental governance frameworks.

Thirdly, and perhaps most critically, Romania could act as a key player in strengthening Mercosur-EU relations by serving as a cultural and political translator within the European bloc. Its Latin roots and historical inclination towards inter-civilizational dialogue position it well to foster trust, mediate regulatory divergences, and advance consensus-building. Brazil, in turn, could serve as a pragmatic gateway for Romanian engagement with Latin America, offering insights into the political and developmental rhythms of the region.

Such bilateral and interregional synergies should be leveraged not only to deepen trade but to reimagine the foundations of intercontinental cooperation in the 21st century. The fragmentation of multipolarity - rather than signalling disarray - offers an opportunity to recompose diplomatic architectures around shared values, multidirectional flows of knowledge, and more symmetrical economic partnerships.

In sum, the Brazil-Romania axis invites us to think beyond the dichotomies of North and South, centre and periphery. It exemplifies how historically non-central actors can mobilize structural and symbolic resources to build bridges across continents. If strategically cultivated, this partnership can contribute to a more coherent and sustainable international order - one that values multilateralism, resilience, and cooperation over competition.

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# TOWARDS THE END OF HIS CAREER – DIMITRIE C. PENESCU, ROMANIAN MINISTER TO THE NORDIC COUNTRIES (1928-1929). SOME CONSIDERATIONS

**Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu**

**ABSTRACT:** *The article examines Dimitrie C. Penescu's final diplomatic posting as Romania's Minister Plenipotentiary to the Nordic countries (1928-1929), accredited in Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, and Helsinki. Building on Romania's evolving diplomatic network in the region established during WWI, Penescu's mission aimed to cultivate a favorable image of Romania, intensify trade, and counteract Hungarian propaganda. Despite his short one-year tenure due to financial reasons, Penescu engaged with local officials and press, and notably facilitated the establishment of the Swedish-Romanian Society to foster bilateral understanding. His tenure highlights the challenges and priorities of Romanian diplomacy in the Nordic region during the interwar period.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Romanian diplomacy; Nordic countries; Dimitrie Penescu; interwar period*

## INTRODUCTION

In Romanian historiography, the name of Dimitrie C. Penescu is rather known due to his activity as Minister of Romania to the Holy See, a position he held for eight years, between 1920 and 1928. In fact, it was also his most important position, although he worked in Romania's Diplomatic Corps for over three decades. Continuing our recent analyses of his activity[1] in Romanian diplomacy, we will focus here on several aspects related to the last years of his diplomatic career, in particular on his position as Minister Plenipotentiary in Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, and Helsinki (Helsingfors).

### The beginning of Romania's diplomatic network in the Nordic countries

Toward the beginning of 1914, Romania's diplomatic presence abroad comprised 15 legations and one diplomatic agency in Cairo. When Romania entered the First World War in August 1916, diplomatic relations with Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, and Germany were suspended. During the hostilities, the decision was to

[1] See, in this regard, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Elena Cristina Brăgea, "Dimitrie C. Penescu: Biographical aspects of the first Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Holy See (1920-1928)", in *Romanian Diplomacy in the 20th Century. Biographies, Institutional Pathways, International Challenges*, Adrian Vițalaru, Ionuț Nistor, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu (eds.), Peter Lang, Berlin, 2021, p. 17-64; Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, "De la Monastir la Salonic. Aspecte din activitatea consulului Dimitrie C. Penescu", in *Artă, școală și politică națională. Prinos închinat profesorului Ion I. Solcanu la împlinirea a 80 de ani*, Petronel Zahariuc, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu (eds.), Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași, 2023, p. 351-371.

establish two new Legations in Northern Europe: Sweden (Stockholm, November 1916) and Norway (Christiania, May 1917).[2]

Given that Romania's connection with the West was practically interrupted through Central Europe, relations with the Nordic countries became of major importance: both in terms of transporting equipment and fighting against propaganda. Nicolae Mișu, the Romanian minister in London, was also aware of the stakes, and in a telegram addressed to the minister of foreign affairs Emanoil Porumbaru, in October 1916, he noted the importance of appointing a diplomatic representative in Stockholm. The legation in the capital of Sweden was established by decree on November 3, 1916, and Grigore Bilciurescu was appointed *chargé d'affaires*. Bilciurescu had entered the ministry in 1895, and in 1913, although consul in Budapest, he had received the title of Minister Plenipotentiary, class II; he was also appointed temporarily a counselor at the Berlin legation, and thus given the opportunity to familiarize himself with Nordic realities. He did not stay in Stockholm for long, as in April 1917 he was replaced by Gheorghe Derussi, as extraordinary envoy.[3] The latter was appointed envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the Royal Court of Denmark, presenting his letters of accreditation in Copenhagen at the end of August 1917. However, given that Derussi lived in Stockholm more often, Constantin Langa Răşcanu was appointed *chargé d'affaires*, remaining in this capacity until July 1919.[4]

Also, in January 1917, the importance of opening new services to support propaganda and defend the country's interests was noted again: "in the current situation caused by the European war, Romania needs two services to protect its superior interests, one for political information, the other for propaganda; both closely linked, placed under one and the same direction. These two services must be organized in neutral countries: Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, but especially in Switzerland and Sweden where the propaganda of foreign agents against our country is very widespread and from where precise and detailed information can be obtained both on the plans of our enemies, as well as on what is happening in that part of our country, occupied by enemy armies. All states, large and small, have such services, organized since the outbreak of the European war".[5]

Gheorghe Bilciurescu was transferred to Norway, and on May 1, 1917, he was appointed, by royal decree no. 408 of May 3/16, 1917, envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of Romania to Christiania. The legations in Northern Europe played an

[2] Also, new diplomatic missions were established in Japan (Tokyo, August 1917) and in the USA (Washington, August 1917). On the contrary, in January 1918 diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia were interrupted [see also Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, "Ultimele zile de libertate, primele zile de închisoare: diplomați și consuli români în Rusia (1917-1918)", in *Analele Științifice ale Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași* (Serie Nouă). Istorie, Număr special/Special issue Marea Unire a Românilor (1918) – Istorie și actualitate/The Great Union of the Romanians (1918) – History and Actuality, tome LIX/2018, vol. edited by Petronel Zahariuc, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Adrian Vițalaru, Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași, p. 149-170].

[3] P. Oprescu, "Înfiinţarea reprezentanţelor diplomatice ale României la Stockholm şi Oslo (Christiania)", in vol. *Reprezentanţele diplomatice ale României*, vol. II, 1911-1939, Editura Politică, București, 1971, p. 100-102.

[4] Nicolae-Alexandru Nicolescu, "Înfiinţarea reprezentanţelor diplomatice ale României la Copenhaga", in vol. *Reprezentanţele diplomatice ale României*, p. 85.

[5] Biblioteca Națională a României [Romanian National Library, hereinafter BNR], Fund Saint Georges, file 938, p. 22.

even more important role after the takeover of leadership in Russia, first in February 1917, by the Provisional Government, and then by the Bolsheviks in October 1917: many Romanians left Russia and, on their way to Western Europe, the connecting bridge were the Scandinavian countries.

We can note that, at the end of World War I, Romania had diplomatic missions in Stockholm and Christiania, and there was a *chargé d'affaires* in Copenhagen. In May 1919, Grigore Bilciurescu, who was in Oslo, believed that the mission had become a "useless luxury". He suggested to his colleague from the central administration in Bucharest, Nicolae Docan, that one legation was enough for the three northern states. He argued that – besides the Great Powers – only Cuba and Romania had legations in Norway: the first because of economic interests, while the Romanian state, due to the war unfolding.[6]

After 1920, owing to a new legislation that reorganized the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, some new diplomatic missions were created, while others were closed.[7] Regarding the missions in the Nordic countries, we can observe a certain instability. In the aftermath of Finland's recognition as an independent state, Romania established a diplomatic legation in Helsinki in 1921. The mission, however, was short-lived: it was closed a year later, with diplomatic functions reassigned to the Minister Plenipotentiary based in Stockholm.

The Romanian legation in Oslo was also closed in 1922. Consequently, from that point onward and for several years, "the legation in Stockholm served as Romania's sole diplomatic mission in the Nordic region, managing bilateral relations with all four states ".[8]

## DIMITRIE C. PENESCU, MINISTER OF ROMANIA TO STOCKHOLM, OSLO, COPENHAGEN AND HELSINKI

Dimitrie Penescu was appointed - after eight years at the Holy See (1920-1928) - by the royal decree of January 2, 1928, as Envoy extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Royal Courts of Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen. However, he did not leave until five months later, presenting his recall letters from the Holy See on May 23, 1928[9]. He replaced Mihail Pâclianu, who had been in the Nordic countries for almost ten years.[10]

At the time of his appointment[11] to the three Nordic courts - the residence of the legation being in Stockholm - Penescu did not have the necessary knowledge to occupy such a position, as he was not familiar with the realities of the Nordic countries. Instead,

[6] Biblioteca Academiei Române [Library of the Romanian Academy hereinafter BAR], Secția Manuscrise [Manuscripts Section] , S 20 (27)/CDXXXIV, Grigore Bilciurescu to N. Docan, May 9th, 1919.

[7] In 1921, Romania had 25 permanent diplomatic missions.

[8] Adrian Vițalaru, "Romanian Diplomats in the Scandinavian Countries" (1916-1947), in *Revista Română de Studii Baltice și Nordice/The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, vol. 6, Issue 2 (2014), p. 151.

[9] Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Elena Cristina Brăgea, "Dimitrie C. Penescu: Biographical Aspects of the First Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Holy See (1920-1928)", p. 61.

[10] About his activity, see Adrian Vițalaru, "Mihail Pâclianu – a Romanian Diplomat in the Nordic Countries (1919-1928)", in *Revista Română de Studii Baltice și Nordice*, vol. 11, Issue 2, 2019, p. 49-62.

[11] For details about his biography, see Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Elena Cristina Brăgea, "Dimitrie C. Penescu: Biographical Aspects of the First Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Holy See (1920-1928)", p. 17-64; Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, "De la Monastir la Salonic. Aspecte din activitatea consulului Dimitrie C. Penescu", p. 351-371.

he could benefit from his three-decade long experience as a career diplomat. At the beginning of his career, he alternated positions in the central administration with those within legations and consulates in the Balkan Peninsula, and from 1911 until his appointment to the Holy See in 1920, he worked within the diplomatic mission in Rome.

The Romanian legation in Sweeden did not have a large staff, on the contrary. At the time of Penescu's arrival, Constantin I. Karadja had been in Stockholm since March 1, 1928[12], the two of them working together very well. The diplomatic mission also included Constantin Uhrinovschi, as *press attaché*, and N. Dianu, who was also *chargé d'affaires* to the Finnish government. By the time of Penescu's departure, in the summer of the following year, Constantin Flondor had also joined the diplomatic mission.

On June 11, 1928, Penescu took up his new position, taking over the direction of the legation from Nicolae Dianu, who had led the legation as *chargé d'affaires*. The new head of mission presented his credentials to King Gustav of Sweden on June 13, 1928, who wore the uniform of a cavalry general and who, among other decorations, also had the Grand Cross of the Order of the "Star of Romania". Penescu had noticed that at the Swedish Court there was no custom of delivering speeches on the occasion of presenting letters of accreditation, and the two had a pleasant conversation for approximately 40 minutes. The discussions focused on the political situation in Romania and Sweden[13]. The two already knew each other, having met during the months that King of Sweden had spent incognito in Rome at the beginning of 1928.[14]

In the first days after his arrival, the new head of mission also met the Prime Minister Carl G. Ekman, who confessed to him that there were no difficult issues in the bilateral relations at that time. Moreover, both countries also had a common interest: to observe the actions of Soviet Russia. One aspect that could be improved was the commercial one, given that the Romanian market had become attractive for Swedish products. The Swedish official raised the possibility of concluding a treaty of friendship and arbitration with Romania, if there was interest from the decision-makers in Bucharest. The discussion with Carl Ekman allowed Penescu to draw some conclusions: the Swedes had little information about Romania, there was no hostility coming from government circles, and the negative articles about Romania appearing in the Swedish press were the product of the Hungarian propaganda that was quite active in the Nordic countries.[15]

A month later, through a report dated July 8 sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Penescu announced his departure for Oslo and Copenhagen to present his letters of accreditation to the two Royal Courts. On this trip he was accompanied only by Constantin I. Karadja, the legation's secretary for economic affairs, the latter's presence facilitating

[12] In September 1928, he was appointed, by Royal Decree, Consul General of Romania at the legation in Stockholm. About his activity, see Stelian Obiziuc, "Constantin I. Karadja (1889-1950) – o pagină de aur în istoria diplomației românești", in *Revista Română de Drept Internaţional*, nr. 14 (ian.-iun. 2012) / 15 (iul.-dec. 2012), p. 179-200; Constantin I. Karadja, *Manual diplomatic și consular*, Ottmar Trașcă, Stelian Obiziuc (eds.), Editura Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2013.

[13] Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereinafter AMAE], Fund Problema 77, Letter P51, p. 24-32.

[14] Ibidem, p. 20.

[15] AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 25, p. 48-49.

his discussions with the ministers of the two countries, as well as the discussions with press representatives from Oslo and Copenhagen. In fact, Dimitrie C. Penescu went to Oslo only twice: when he presented his letters of accreditation, on July 14, 1928, to King Haakon VII of Norway, and at the beginning of August 1929, when he presented his letters of recall[16]. Under these conditions, the person who ensured the relationship with the Norwegian authorities was Constantin Flondor, legation counselor and *chargé d'affaires.*[17] Similarly, Penescu went to Copenhagen only on the occasion of presenting his letters of accreditation to the King of Denmark, Christian X. The person who ensured the relations with the Danish authorities was again Constantin Flondor.

As soon as he arrived in Stockholm, Dimitrie Penescu proposed – and the decision-makers in Bucharest agreed – that N. Dianu temporarily managed "our affairs" in Finland as well. Through such a solution, according to Penescu, "a harmful interruption of our diplomatic relations with the latter country was avoided".[18] At the end of 1928, it was decided to accredit Penescu [19] in the Republic of Finland as well. On January 18, 1929, his letters of accreditation were sent. He presented them a few days later. The next day he returned to Stockholm, which discontended the Minister of Foreign Affairs, G. Mironescu, who scolded him for not staying longer in Finland's capital.[20]

The first instructions received by Penescu in the summer of 1928 were very clear: to make every effort to cultivate a favorable image of Romania in the countries to which he was accredited. In fact, both when presenting the letters of accreditation in Copenhagen[21], and in Oslo[22], he was interviewed by the local press of the two states and his message emphasized the importance of political and economic relations with Denmark, but also with Norway. As already highlighted in literature, Penescu's mission to Sweden had several clear objectives: intensifying trade relations and attracting the Swedish political class to the Romanian cause in the "Transylvania issue", given that the Hungarian propaganda against Romania was very active in the Scandinavian countries.[23] Moreover, the Scandinavian countries were, in the first years of the interwar period, on the "periphery" of Romania's external propaganda, our country's actions being influenced even by the instability of diplomatic posts. Since the spring of 1928, N. Dianu and C. Karadja had acted in favour of a more energetic propaganda defending Romania's interests through the Swedish press; and in June 1928 a set of 50 ethnographic, color maps of Transylvania was sent from Bucharest.[24]

[16] Ana-Maria Florea (Despa), *România și Norvegia în prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea*, doctoral thesis, Târgoviște, p. 74.

[17] AMAE, Fund Problema 77, Letter P51, p. 46.

[18] Ibidem.

[19] For an analysis of Romanian-Finnish relations in the interwar period, see Silviu-Marian Miloiu, "An untold story: The Romanian-Finnish Diplomatic Bonds (1923- 1939)", in *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies*, 7-8/2007, p. 93-110.

[20] *Ibidem*, p. 52-53.

[21] Oana Popescu, *România și Danemarca în prima jumătate a secolului XX*, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, p. 52.

[22] Ana-Maria Florea (Despa), *op. cit.*, p. 74-75.

[23] Andreea Dahlquist, *România și Suedia în perioada Celui de-Al Doilea Război Mondial*, Editura Eikon, București, 2023, p. 56-59.

[24] Nicolae Ureche, *Propaganda externă a României Mari 1918-1940*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2015, p. 305-307.

Penescu's reports sent from Stockholm capture aspects related to Sweden's domestic politics, bilateral relations and international political life. In one of his first reports, the new head of mission captured the state of "tranquillity" in Swedish domestic political life, but also the fact that "in the minds of the Swedish people the old fear of Russia has not yet disappeared, so that the well-known Swedish Germanophilia was and still is rather a point of support and defense against Russia".[25] In his reports from autumn 1928 and in the first months of the following year, Penescu analyzed the results of the September elections for the second Chamber of the "Riksdag", the resignation of the Ekman government and the formation of a new cabinet under the presidency of Admiral Lindman, the debates in the Swedish Parliament, but also the possibility of a ministerial crisis in May-June 1929.[26]

At the end of the summer of 1928, the capital of Norway hosted the International History Congress. The Romanian delegation was formed by N. Iorga, Gh. Brătianu, I. Andrieșescu, G. Fotino, C. Marinescu, V. Gomoiu, P.P. Panaitescu, Gen. Radu Rosetti, G.G. Mateescu, A. Oțetea, Emil Panaitescu and C. Karadja, each giving talks within different sessions. At the end of the congress, N. Iorga was invited to give a radio conference in the capital of Sweden, the subject being *Carol XII and Romania*.[27] In Stockholm, the great historian visited the Nordisk Museum, where he saw a sword by Constantin Brâncoveanu, held a conference in German at a women's society, visited the royal tombs, and met with various Swedish personalities. On August 23, Minister Penescu hosted a luncheon attended by teachers, journalists, and directors of cultural institutions, and N. Iorga spoke about the ties between Romanians and Swedes.[28] Upon returning to Romania, Iorga published, in 1929, his impressions about his travels and the four conferences he held in Sweden and Norway.[29] Moreover, in a report sent by Karadja to Penescu, immediately after the end of the congress, he noted that "N. Iorga had managed to make us useful propaganda in Oslo, granting several interviews to the Norwegian press".[30]

During the months spent as head of mission in the Nordic countries, Penescu gave several interviews to newspapers in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, and his collaborators within the legation published articles in which they presented the history of Romania and the evolution of Romanian-Danish relations.[31] Such actions were necessary given that Penescu's predecessor, Mihail Pâcleanu, pointed out in 1926 that the Swedish press had an "unfriendly" attitude towards Romania.[32]

[25] AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 1 (1923-1935), p. 376.

[26] AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 19 (1920-1929), p. 373-418.

[27] AMAE, Fund Congrese și conferințe, vol. 240, Congrese internaționale de istorie, nepaginat; see also, Raluca Tomi, "Nicolae Iorga în elita istoriografiei internaționale. Activitatea sa în cadrul Comitetului Internațional de științe istorice (1926-1940)", in *Revista Istorică*, tom XXXII, 2021, nr. 1–3, p. 27-28, 36-37.

[28] N. Iorga, *Memorii (Agonia regală și regența)*, vol. V, Editura Națională „S. Ciornei", p. 301.

[29] N. Iorga, "Țeri Scandinave: Suedia și Norvegia. Note de drum și conferințe", Ed. Casei Școalelor, București, 1929. An edition of this work appeared in 2008 under the care of historian Silviu Miloiu.

[30] BAR, Corespondența Iorga, vol. 343/2, p. 531.

[31] Nicolae Ureche, *op. cit.*, p. 305-307.

[32] Idem, *Nici pace, nici război. România-Ungaria, 1919-1940*, Editura Universității București, București, 2004, p. 313.

Penescu was also active in the cultural domain, and his efforts materialized in the establishment of the Swedish-Romanian Society in May 1929. As emphasized in the Romanian press, its purpose was to "bring the two friendly countries closer together" and to inform the Swedish public about Romania.[33] An important role in the establishment of the society was played by the Romanian diplomats, Dimitrie C. Penescu and Constantin Karadja, along with several Swedish journalists, such as E. Fahlbeck, director of „Svensk Tidskrift", Dr. Brillioth, head of the Swedish Press Agency and president of the international press office in Stockholm, F. Henrikson, legation counselor, and Annie Quensel, a well-known writer in Sweden in the 1920s.[34] General Baron Sparre, Chief of Artillery of Sweden, was elected President of the Society, and I. Collijin, Chief Librarian of the Kingdom, was elected Vice-President. At the same time, the Minister of Sweden in Bucharest, the Minister of Romania in Stockholm, and the Archbishop of Uppsala, Natan Söderblom, were elected honorary members.[35]

In February 1929, Penescu was questioned by the Swedish Foreign Minister, Trygger, about the consequences of Romania's signing of the Litvinov Protocol. The Swedish official considered that "our signing of the Moscow Protocol, even after the ratification of the Kellogg Pact, constitutes an undoubted success for our country, as it ensures against any possible Russian aggression and at the same time proves the definitive character of the Polish-Romanian alliance, as well as the deeply pacifist tendencies pursued by our foreign policy, tendencies that are entirely in line with those of Sweden".[36] The Romanian diplomat replied, arguing that the signing of the Litvinov Protocol signified a strengthening of peace in Eastern Europe and of peace in general.[37]

Penescu held this position in the Nordic countries only for a year, this being his last diplomatic mission abroad. In June 1929, it was announced that, for financial reasons, Several Romanian diplomatic missions were to be left without ambassadors and he was recalled to the central administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from August 1 of the same year[38]. The diplomat was convinced that he had successfully fulfilled his mission in Stockholm, "an important center of the Hungarian propaganda against Romania", but had expected to spend more time in the Nordic countries. He understood, on the other hand, the difficult financial situation of Romania and that the measure taken by the Minister of Foreign Affairs was not directed against him personally[39]. Moreover, a new plenipotentiary minister was not immediately sent from Bucharest, so that until February 1930 the diplomatic representation was carried out at the level of *chargé d'affaires*.

[33] Andreea Dahlquist, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[34] *Dreptatea*, anul III, nr. 495, 8 iunie 1929, p. 2 (article written by Madeleine Hamilton).

[35] AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 25, p. 62-64.

[36] AMAE, Fund Suedia, vol. 1 (1923-1935), p. 58.

[37] Ibidem, f. 59-60.

[38] In the same situation were H. Catargi (Brussels), Filip Lahovary (Cairo), Ion P. Carp (The Hague), Anton Bibescu (Madrid) and I. Trandafirescu (Tirana). (AMAE, Fund Problem 77, Letter P51, vol. II, p. 54)

[39] AMAE, Fund Problem 77, Letter P51, vol. I, p. 153-156, vol. II, p. 54-62.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When Romania's first diplomatic missions were established in the Nordic countries, during the first years of their activity, the decision-makers in Bucharest preferred to send diplomats who were heading a legation for the first time. However, as in the case of his predecessor, Mihail Pâclianu, but also of his successor, Carol M. Mitilineu, the post in the Nordic countries was for Penescu his last as head of mission. This may suggest that, in the first decade of the interwar period, mainly those who were towards the end of their diplomatic careers were sent to the Nordic countries. Overall, Penescu successfully carried out his mission during the time he spent in the Nordic countries, although he didn't have much time at his disposal. Having his residence in Stockholm, he traveled very few times to Oslo, Copenhagen and Helsinki. He had discussions with Swedish officials, gave interviews to the press from the four countries, thus trying to contribute to a better image of Romania in the Nordic countries, and had some important cultural initiatives, perhaps the most important being the establishment of the Romanian-Swedish Society. However, we cannot see any particular interest of the decision-makers in Bucharest for the four states, a fact to which we can also add financial problems that were already threatening Romania at the end of the first interwar decade.

# THE CONSTRUCTION OF ILLIBERAL DISCURSIVE SPACES[1]

**Raluca Ilie**

*"The trouble with having an open mind, of course,*
*is that people will insist on coming along and trying to put things in it."*
**Terry Pratchett, *Diggers***

Media freedom and civic communication, as main pillars of democratic societies, must be treated as key priorities in times of instability, as they have the power to articulate the world we live in. Starting from this premise, Václav Štětka and Sabina Mihelj attempt to explain illiberal interactions and developments through the prism of communication. They pursue this objective systematically through rigorous writing, accompanied by various non-textual elements. They also raise significant questions regarding whether people become what they consume and how immune we are to disinformation and misinformation.

The authors' areas of expertise, which range from political communication to media and cultural analysis, inform their eclectic approach to the study of illiberalism. This approach is supported by a mixed methods research design, which successfully grasps how cultural and psycho-social factors play into the construction of illiberal communicative spaces. While the tone is set by a foundationalist ontology, the interviews conducted also reveal, perhaps incidentally, normative changes in certain concepts, such as "media trust" as a consequence of the rise of illiberalism. These dynamics are explored against the most similar system design by tracing polarization dynamics across the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Serbia, countries that share a common background of state-owned media during communism, replaced by different degrees of media liberalization.

The book attempts to offer insight into the spatialization of both traditional and new media in the ecosystem of processes that control the enhancement and mitigation of illiberalism, a phenomenon which can be identified by its conflicting nature, processual orientation and holistic materialization as an ideology, macrocosm of measures and institutional dynamics (p. 27). Although it mainly concerns traceable interactions of political communication, it also echoes the performative function of communication, which enables the reconstruction of what is perceived as sensible, acceptable and even desirable. Among the findings of the book, one can discover a powerful statement about how tools of connection end up designing disconnection.

The novelty that the book suggests lies in the approach to studying the relationship between communication and illiberalism, which covers both top-down and bottom-up processes, corresponding to the contribution of both elites and citizens as actors that come together within the illiberal public sphere (IPS). It also addresses variables such as

[1] Štětka, V. & Mihelj, S., *The Illiberal Public Sphere: Media in Polarized Societies*, Cham: Springer Nature, 2024.

media trust, the presence on social media and media repertoires in a differentiated way. This differentiated way of addressing concepts that are often studied in a generalized way reveals a more accurate picture of the reasoning that underlies citizens' positioning on the liberal/illiberal spectrum. More precisely, it allows for the study of trust in separate news brands as opposed to media trust in general, of the presence on social networking apps and messaging apps as opposed to the presence on online platforms, which are lumped together as a uniform whole for disseminating information, as well as for the study of closed and open patterns of media consumption as opposed to broad media repertoires that do not account for ideological overlaps.

The study of communication, not only as an accompanying feature but as a structural component of illiberalism, comes at a time when, globally, illiberalism is escalating, judging by the positioning of the governing parties vis-à-vis diversity, human rights, soft power use and civility in political interactions (Lührmann et al., 2020). The most recent V-Dem report reveals that the state of democracy at the country level corresponds to the one in 1996[2], the number of autocracies has surpassed that of democracies, and the liberal model of democracy is the most uncommon model of governance at the global level (Nord et al., 2025). Against this background, the media came to be one of the most weaponized instruments to erode existing democratic systems, a pattern which, for the Eastern European region, has been supported over time by political parallelism and clientelism.

These world dynamics correspond with the context of the book, which attempts to explain the processual nature of illiberal public spheres, given that these public spheres operate within a liminal state between the opposing poles of democracy and authoritarianism (p. 26). Although applied to the communicative dimension, the logic of the public illiberal sphere as being fluctuant along a continuum seems to reflect parts of Carother's (2002) perspective on the process of democratization. He challenged the core assumptions of the transition paradigm and used the term "grey zones" to refer to those countries where the detachment from authoritarian systems did not follow a linear progression (contention, conversion, consolidation) towards democracy building, but rather an alternating process.

With this in mind, the book develops three stages of the illiberal public sphere (incipient, ascendent, and hegemonic) based on indices that measure different aspects related to the scope and interactions of the IPS, media forms that support it, actors involved, media governance, as well as elements of both external and internal media plurality. To match different stages of the IPS, Serbia and the aforementioned V4 countries are chosen. By focusing on the Eastern Europe region, where patterns of media capture are mirrored among countries, the book attempts to shed light upon the specificities of communicative spaces at different stages of polarization.

[2] The year 1996 also marked a pivotal moment when significant changes began to emerge in Eastern Europe regarding the communication of global events, set against the backdrop of declining newspaper readership in the media market and the proliferation of digital media (see Papathanassopoulos & Miconi, 2023).

One interesting observation, based on the population surveyed, is that, unlike popular opinion, people are not necessarily prisoners of echo chambers and engage in "open media diets", which means that a great proportion of the population, in almost all stages of the IPS, follows content that is ideologically heterogenous (p. 81). At the same time, this finding is complemented by the association between those countries where the media are highly polarized and the people who engage the most in closed media consumption, which can be used as a stepping stone for future research on the effect of biased news media on political beliefs.

After setting the background of media polarization, the authors proceed to explore the patterns of media trust. Several interesting observations emerge, such as the fact that in countries where the IPS is deeply ingrained, some people follow the media even when they identify it as being unreliable, choose to trust it despite being able to pinpoint the lack of autonomy and assign different meanings to media independence, which is perceived mainly based on "independence from foreign powers, the political mainstream, or editorial control" (p. 90). Although the convenience of access and routine are discussed as possible factors that interplay with consumption behaviors, the actual leading factors that trigger these dynamics remain unknown. The patterns described reflect a distorted relationship between citizens and the communication environments at their disposal. They delineate a political environment deprived of desirable standards of civic communication which would allow citizens to engage coherently with information. It would seem that the vagueness looming over such a media environment, the bizarre ways of conceptualizing independence, and the stretchable semantics of trust align with what the literature describes as practices that strategically create incongruity between the perceived and the actual state of affairs. These practices involve the employment of democratic structures as shields that hide and legitimize non-democratic action, eventually laying the foundation for parallel realities (Varol, 2014).

Chapter 6 addresses the specificities of newer forms of political communication by tapping into the connection between digital forms of engagement with information and people's political attitudes. Despite digital environments being generally condemned for disseminating disinformation, as well as for their poor control and detection of inauthentic engagement, the book shows that a higher level of activity on social media corresponds with support for democracy and liberal leanings among people. Regarding the liberal leanings, it is worth mentioning that, depending on the country and the specific historical underpinnings, the alignment with liberal values was found to oscillate between alignment with cultural and constitutional liberalism, more precisely with cultural and institutional aspects of liberal democracies. The variation reflects the utility of clearly operationalizing the support for liberal democracies as it conveys which topics are most sensitive to polarization and how the political particularities of each country might shape what aspects people prioritize.

This finding can be further used to understand why illiberal messages and actors thrive on digital platforms if these channels are predominantly used by people who support democratic values. One can assume that social media platforms enable targeted communication in a way that cannot be replicated by other communicative environments. Thus, illiberal content reaches with a high degree of accuracy people who already align with those messages, securing greater success. Another possibility could be explained by the fact that illiberal attitudes circulate predominantly in secluded environments, an idea confirmed by another finding of the book according to which illiberal manifestations are more likely to scatter across private platforms. A third possibility could explore the advantage that social media spaces offer for political actors who can engage with several graphic representations as an additional layer of meaning-making. This practice facilitates the "construction of their visual rhetoric" through symbols that strengthen people's sense of involvement in political life, redefine the perception of factuality and mimic transparency (Mendonça and Caetano, 2021, 220). Given this, digital platforms have the capacity to grasp the performative potential of imagery by creating a space where the visual narrations act as instruments of legitimizing alternative realities.

Despite not being a central topic of the book, digital media are also explored as communicative spaces for connecting people with ideas produced by alleged experts.[3] We must note that inquiry into this phenomenon starts from the premise that the utility of expert knowledge is actually valued and recognized. From the interviews conducted, it results that the trust in experts may be affected by factors such as the existence of conflicting opinions among experts on the same issues of interest and their affiliation to the government or to mainstream media. These concerns are represented as contributing factors to the appeal and the success of pseudo-experts as alternative sources of information. The patterns of distrust offer an outlook on the construction of legitimacy outside of the traditional media spaces and actors. They explain how information-seeking behaviors can easily slide into wishful thinking legitimation and redefine factuality. Against profound disbelief and a general atmosphere of skepticism, the quality of news is defined by personal assumptions of what reliability is. In this context, the realm of social media appears as a fragile space because, while offering the opportunity to critically explore different theories, it "can also offer access to misinformation, and further polarize and politicize the discussion, thereby contributing to distrust", as the authors explain (p. 232).

Although one should be mindful of the explanatory limitations of certain correlations and the cross-sectional design, the book provides a multi-level perspective on the intricate and sometimes counterintuitive patterns of news consumption, which evolve with the diversification of communication channels. A beautiful blend of data that both confirms and challenges certain accepted beliefs about traditional and new media, the book is topical, compelling and harmonious. It develops as a daring exploration of the public sphere, not as a still entity, but rather as a fluid, ever-changing interaction between civil society and media actors.

Despite the myriads of topics approached, several ideas can be further explored. The book lays the groundwork for further inquiry into the value of interdisciplinary research on the evolution of illiberalism. As the authors touched upon the idea that citizens engage with sources they consistently distrust, it would be interesting to observe how this behavior plays into the literature *on priming. If we know that citizens knowingly consume distrustful news, it is sensible to explore more the effect of exposure to certain media on the criteria which are considered when forming opinions about political affairs, referred*

[3] The notion of "presumed expertise" refers to an apparent capacity to produce information with a scientific character, which nonetheless lacks genuine epistemological validity (cf. Blancke et al., 2017).

*to as priming* (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Although the authors try to cover topics such as the interpretation of the criteria used to judge trustworthiness and the link between the consumption of biased information and the development of political beliefs, it is also worth examining how, in the long term, contact with distrustful news shapes the architecture of our thinking.

Delving deeper into the ramifications of social psychology, another point challenges the type of polarization addressed by the book. Although it seems that overall, the book tackles the ideological subtype of polarization, some parts touch upon information-seeking patterns based on affective grounds. This can be observed as part of the answers collected from the interviews of the people who portrayed their willingness to follow diverse sources of news as a way of "knowing the enemy", rather than as a way of exploring new avenues of thought (p. 100). Therefore, this pattern reflects affective polarization, which is characterized by unchallenged positive perceptions about one's own group members and negative perceptions towards others. Along these lines, further questions arise. They address how susceptible open media diets are to affective polarization, taking into consideration the different stages of development of the illiberal public sphere. In the case of a fully developed IPS, does exposure to diverse sources strengthen pre-existing beliefs due to polarization based on affect?

All in all, the book successfully captures the many aspects of political communication and its contribution to illiberal practices. It coherently reflects the interplay between citizens and different types of media. More than anything, it represents a powerful statement that reminds us of the importance of preserving strong standards of civic communication, which enable people to monitor political developments accurately, search for information rationally and make relevant choices.

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# SYRIA'S FORGOTTEN PROMISE: HOW THE REVOLUTION FELL TO OPPOSITION'S FAILURES

**Carmen Prodan**

"He who kills his own people is a traitor" is one of the striking phrases that lingers in the reader's mind while navigating Samira al-Masalma's *The Collapse of Syria: The Struggle for Power, State and Identity*[1]. More than a chronological account of the Syrian uprising and its aftermath, the book offers a nuanced exploration of the ideological and psychological forces that shaped the conflict. Al-Masalma presents a dual perspective, capturing both the experiences of civilians and the rationale of those in power who orchestrated the repression. Within her analysis, the author exposes the mechanisms through which authoritarian control was maintained and normalized, revealing the deeper roots of Syria's enduring crisis.

To what extent can the Syrian conflict be attributed solely to the Assad family's consolidation of power? Alternatively, should it be conceptualized primarily as a theater of competing international interests? Or, more fundamentally, does the conflict stem from underlying internal divisions that have enabled the persistence of authoritarian governance? Samira al-Masalma provides a broader context: she gives a deeper examination of the ethnic tensions (particularly concerning the Kurdish population), an overview of the religious divides between Sunnis and Shias, and also an exploration of the strategic interests of key international actors (United States, Russia, Turkey and Iran), as the Syrian conflict evolved from a struggle for regime survival into a full-scale proxy battleground. These aspects are entangled with arguments suggesting that part of the conflict's complexity stems from the mere existence of Israel, which views the Assad regime as a stabilizing force that indirectly safeguards its own security.

This compelling account is shaped by Samira al-Masalma's unique dual position: both as a citizen disillusioned with her country's political reality and as a committed advocate for the voiceless: first through her position as a journalist and later as vice president of the Syrian opposition (Syrian National Coalition/SNC). Her engagement with the revolution began in 2011 when, as a journalist respected by both sides, she rapidly fell into disfavor. After publicly revealing the truth about the regime's violent crackdown in Dar'a (an event that would become *the black swan of Bashar al-Assad's rule)*, the intensification of her decline was accelerated due to her outspoken stance as Vice President, where she frequently raised concerns about internal issues within the coalition, such as financial opacity and extremist influences, and even called for internal investigations.

[1] Samira al-Masalma, *Prăbușirea Siriei: Conflictul pentru putere, stat și identitate / The Collapse of Syria: The Struggle for Power, State and Identity*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2024.

Samira al-Masalma's work extends beyond domestic political analysis. She broadens the scope to include the role of international powers, highlighting how foreign interests have been projected upon the Syrian territory, while one of the book's more striking aspects is her actual refusal to adopt a binary stance toward these external actors. Thus, the author offers a balanced critique, acknowledging that all international stakeholders - regardless of political alignment - have, in various ways, contributed both positively and detrimental to the struggle of the Syrian people and the endurance of the regime. Al-Masalma refuses a simplistic "good vs. evil" narrative about foreign involvement as she points out the US's inconsistent support for opposition groups, Russia's 2015 military interventions and diplomatic shielding at the UN, Iran's support for militias (like Hezbollah and the mobilization of Shia fighters) and regional powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia which, while opposing Assad, contributed to factionalism and fragmentation by backing various rebel groups with competing agendas (driven by geopolitical aims, such as Turkey's curbing Kurdish autonomy and expanding its influence in northern Syria).

Many explanations for the revolution's failure have been proposed, with several attributing significant influence to these foreign actors (motives such as the establishment of a Syrian interim government that increasingly served Turkish interests). Yet numerous questions persist, both internally and on the international stage. Despite the various diplomatic efforts - Geneva, Astana, Sochi - ambiguity still surrounds the direction and legitimacy of key decisions. Yet, one cannot help but wonder: would a coalition independent of any military faction have enabled a clearer distinction between "those fighting for a democratic Syria and those pursuing an Islamic Emirate"?

In this regard, Samira's broader overview of the Syrian situation truly stands out. Arguably, it is the author's bold decision to place much of the blame, in the end, on the opposition itself: an opposition that, rather than articulating a cohesive political strategy, fractured into rival factions and increasingly resorted to militarized tactics. Thus, factions like the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Islamist groups (Jabhat al-Nusra, later Hayat Tahrir al-Sham), and more extremist groups (ISIS) often clashed on the battlefield rather than uniting against the regime. This shift, al-Masalma argues, derailed the revolutionary momentum and obstructed any chance of closure in the aftermath of the uprising. In contested regions like Aleppo and Idlib, these armed factions asserted control, marginalizing moderate and civil society actors advocating political transition, leading thus to a fragmentation which generated a power vacuum subsequently exploited by extremist groups, notably ISIS in eastern Syria and Jabhat al-Nusra in Idlib. Although a nuanced examination of the Syrian National Coalition as the main representative of the popular revolution is depicted, the author offers critical insight into why Syria, unlike other Arab Spring nations, failed in the end to transition towards a democratic system capable of ending over five decades of authoritarian rule.

To gain a deeper understanding of a country that had long been neglected by analysts, the media and intellectuals, particularly after Assad fled the country in December 2024, it is more crucial than ever to critically assess Syria's potential future, both in terms of its national trajectory and its position on the international stage. *The Collapse of Syria: The Struggle for Power, State, and Identity* offers an excellent starting point for grasping the political dynamics and making informed predictions about what may lie ahead.What the reader must take away, as highlighted by the author, is that the shift from a political uprising to an armed conflict marked a pivotal moment: one that ultimately played into the hands of the regime. By reframing the revolution as a military confrontation with rebellion, the regime was able to legitimize its authority, evade accountability and justify its use of violence. However, in an ending note key and by the author's words: "the opposition belongs to politics; the revolution belongs to the people".

Samira al-Masalma's *The Collapse of Syria* is not just a depiction of a country's fall, but a clear-eyed account of how a revolution lost its way. She shows how both the regime's tactics and the opposition's failures turned a popular uprising into a prolonged tragedy and, as Syria remains caught between foreign interests and internal fractures, the future feels as uncertain as ever. Can a nation reclaim its voice after so many years of silence and struggle? Or has the moment for real change already passed?

# FROM AMONG RDI'S RECENT ACTIVITIES

In the first semester of this year, the Romanian Diplomatic Institute continued its activity along its two primary lines of action – research and professional training – within the Department of Expert Analysis and the Department of Professional Training and Administrative Support.

The Institute's researchers published analytical studies, articles, policy papers, and policy briefs, and participated in conferences, colloquia, symposia, round tables, as well as delivering lectures both within the professional training programs organized by the Institute and outside of it. A chronological overview of a selection of these contributions is presented below.

**Publications**

• *NATO's Approach to Cybersecurity: The 2022 Cyberattacks against Albania* by Claudiu Codreanu, policy paper no. 39/2024, available at https://www.idr.ro/publicatii/Codreanu-NATO-cyber_1.pdf

• "Beyond Short-Lived Responses to Malicious Cyber Operations: The UN GGE and OEWG processes" by Claudiu Codreanu, in *Europolity*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2024

• "The Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East after the Fall of Assad's Regime in Syria: between Cooperation Opportunities and Regional Challenges" by Dragoș C. Mateescu, policy paper no. 42/2025 available at https://www.idr.ro/publicatii/Mateescu_PP42_EN.pdf

• "Azerbaijan: A Regional Power after the Karabakh War. What Does This Mean for the EU and Romania? (original title: Azerbaidjan: Putere regională după războiul din Karabakh. Ce înseamnă asta pentru UE și România?)" by Dragoș C. Mateescu, in *Asaltul Suveraniștilor – Fake news, dezinformare și propagandă în super-anul electoral 2024*, editors Marian Voicu and Cătălin Gomboș, Editura Universității de Vest din Timișoara, Timișoara, 2025, p. 71-76

• „Political Culture and Democratic Resilience: A Conceptual-Theoretic Approach. Towards a Pluralist Political Culture", in Putină Natalia, Iațco Natalia (eds.), *Election Integrity and the Quality of Democracy: Challenges and Pathways to Good Governance*, Chișinău: CEP USM, *President Trump's "Fortress America". The Foreign Policy Vision of the New Republican Administration: from "Lonely Superpower" to "Imperial Isolationism"* by Valentin Quintus Nicolescu and Alexandru-Ionuț Drăgulin, policy brief no. 75/2025, available at https://www.idr.ro/publicatii/Nicolescu_PB75_EN.pdf

• "Crossing the Line: Severing Undersea Internet Cables in Geopolitical Hotspots" by Claudiu Codreanu, *policy brief* no. 76/2025, available at https://www.idr.ro/publicatii/Codreanu_PB76_EN.pdf

**Events**

• **January 23-24**. Valentin Quintus Nicolescu participated in the international conference *Election Integrity and the Quality of Democracy: Challenges and Pathways to Good Governance*, Chișinău, Republic of Moldova, with the research paper *Political Culture and Democratic Resilience: A Conceptual-Theoretical Approach*, co-authored by Alexandru-Ionuț Drăgulin.

• **February 18-20**. Claudiu Codreanu took part in the academic conference *Giganet 2024 Annual Symposium*, organized by the Global Internet Governance Academic Network (Giganet), presenting the research paper *Far from a Consensus: Exploring the Role of Digital Authoritarianism in Hindering UN Discussions on Cyber Norms*.

• **March 19-20**. Valentin Quintus Nicolescu and Mihai Constantinescu attended the conference *The Sahel, Russia and the Balkans – Strategic Interests and Challenges. A Conference with Security and Political Experts from Africa and South East Europe*, organized by KAS Sofia and the Atlantic Club.

• **April 4**. George Vișan participated in the conference *Problems of Euro-Atlantic Security in the Context of Current Geopolitical Challenges*, Chernivtsi, where he delivered a lecture addressing both the security situation in the Black Sea region and parliamentary diplomacy concerning the reconstruction of Ukraine.

• **May 12-14**. Mihai Constantinescu took part in the *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy Forum*, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

• **June 5**. George Vișan attended *Round Table Discussion: A Black Sea Strategy for Romania*, organized by Irregular Warfare Initiation, Statul Major al Apărării, and the journal *Gândirea Militară*.

• **June 9-13**. Valentin Quintus Nicolescu participated in *The 14th International Seminar on Energy and Climate Diplomacy*, organized by the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute in Sofia, Bulgaria.

• **June 16-19**. Director General Gheorghe-Vlad Nistor conducted a working visit to Baku to strengthen the strategic partnership between Romania and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

**Lectures**

• **January 23.** Claudiu Codreanu, "Cybersecurity and Foreign Policy", delivered within the Institute's program of *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy*

• **February 28.** Alexandru-Ionuț Drăgulin, "Language – An Important Means of Friendly Relations", online conference organized by the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan

• **March 27.** Dragoș C. Mateescu, "A Major Global Crisis. False Narratives – Themes, Causes, Intended Effects", Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest, under a program conducted by the *Veridica* platform

• **March 31.** Dragoș C. Mateescu, "The Major Global Crisis and Anti-Western Narratives: Themes and Intended Effects", at the conference *Anti-European Disinformation in Romania and the Region – What Is to Be Done?*, organized by the European Institute of Romania (https://ier.gov.ro/event/agora-cetateneasca-europeana-dezinformarea-anti-europeana-in-romania-si-in-regiune-ce-este-de-facut/)

• **April 3.** Dragoș C. Mateescu, intervention during the IDR conference promoting the policy paper "The Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East after the Fall of the Assad Regime in Syria – Between Opportunities for Cooperation and Regional Challenges", with the participation of Cătălin Gomboș (Radio Romania journalist and editor-in-chief of the Veridica platform)

• **April 9.** Dragoș C. Mateescu, "SE Europe: Integration and Connections to the World – Transport, Trade and Energy", as part of the training program provided by IDR for representatives of counterpart institutes from the wider Black Sea area, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

• **May 20.** Alexandru-Ionuț Drăgulin, “Bilateralism in International Relations”, within the Institute’s professional training program *Diplomacy, Polarization and Conflict*

• **May 21.** Claudiu Codreanu, “Digital Authoritarianism. Digital Repression”, within the Institute’s professional training program *Diplomacy, Polarization and Conflict*

• **May 29.** Dragoș C. Mateescu, “The Relationship between Domestic and Foreign Policy”, within the Institute’s course *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy*

• **June 4–5.** Dragoș C. Mateescu, “Turkey – A Partner for NATO and the EU”, within the Institute’s course *Diplomacy, Polarization and Conflict*

• **June 14.** Dragoș C. Mateescu, “Romania-Turkey: Bilateral Relations in the Regional Context”, at the Turkey-Europe-Future Forum, a program of Mercator Stiftung (Germany) and of TUSIAD (Turkey), Radisson Hotel, Bucharest

• **June 18.** Claudiu Codreanu, “Cybersecurity and Foreign Policy”, within the Institute’s program *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy*

These research and representation activities were promoted on our website as well as on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Moreover, we launched the *IDR Talks* podcast on our YouTube channel.

The Romanian Diplomatic Institute maintained good cooperation with journalists and public opinion leaders. We ensured media institutions interested in the topics discussed had access to events held at the RDI headquarters. Furthermore, we informed the press through press releases regarding the public interest topics addressed in our work. RDI experts were regularly invited to television and radio programs to present their own analyzes on current issues. The promotion of these activities was handled by Cristian Iordache, Communication Expert within the RDI.

IDR also received diplomatic visits from the ambassadors of Turkmenistan (February 6), the Philippines (January 16), Indonesia (February 19), India (February 20), Armenia (April 2), Algeria (May 12-14, 2025), Pakistan (May 12-14, 2025), and Uruguay (May 12-14, 2025), as well as from a delegation of three diplomats participating in the European Diplomatic Programme (February 12).

Notable internal events organized by the RDI include: *Ukraine, Three Years of Resilience and Courage: The Long Road from War to Peace* (February 24); *Women Voices in Diplomacy* (March 6); launching the study *The Romania–Moldova–Ukraine Triangle: A Framework for Enhanced Regional Connectivity*; launching the policy paper *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East after the Fall of Assad’s Regime in Syria: Between Cooperation Opportunities and Regional Challenges* (April 3); the diplomatic training program *How Public Diplomacy Could Enhance Regional Security, Cooperation, and European Integration*, in partnership with the Estonian School of Diplomacy and the Ukrainian Diplomatic Academy (April 8–10); *Kidnapped by War: The Return of Ukrainian Children*, in partnership with the Embassy of Ukraine and the Embassy of Canada in Bucharest (May 28); *The 90th Anniversary of Romania–Uruguay Diplomatic Relations* (June 19), and others.

In addition, during the first semester of this year, the Institute organized the following courses: *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy*, 2nd edition (January 28 - February 20); *Communication, Protocol and Etiquette in Diplomacy* (May 5 - June 5); *Diplomacy, Polarization and Conflict: Global and Regional Dynamics* (May 12 - June 12); and *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy*, 3rd edition (May 26 - June 26).

# ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

➢ **Valentin Quintus Nicolescu** holds a PhD in political science from the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest and is a political analyst within the Expert Analysis Unit at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute. He is an associate lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science at SNSPA and the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies at the University of Bucharest. He has published articles and book chapters in fields such as political ideologies, political theory, and international relations theory.

➢ **Andrei Luca** serves as Director for Cultural and Science Diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, since 2023, has been Chair of the European Union Network of Member States' Representatives for Science Diplomacy. Within the MFA, he previously headed both the Department for Relations with Romanians Abroad and the Communications Department. He represented Romania at UN agencies based in Vienna and spent a decade as Deputy Chief of Mission at Romania's embassies in Italy and Spain - a period when these two countries hosted over two-thirds of Romania's total diaspora. Prior to his diplomatic career, he coordinated NGO projects focused on strengthening democracy and market economy reforms.

➢ **Gulayym Beghanova** is a career diplomat currently serving as Third Secretary at the Embassy of Turkmenistan in Romania. She was born in 1995 in Ashgabat and graduated in 2017 from the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan. Upon graduation, she joined the Ministry as a referent in the editorial team of the official magazine *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy of Turkmenistan*, contributing to the promotion of the country's international initiatives and neutral foreign policy. In 2018, she was appointed Attaché in the Department for the Asian-Pacific Region, where she was involved in the development of bilateral relations and multilateral cooperation with countries of that region. Since 2022, she has been posted to Bucharest, actively engaging in diplomatic, cultural, and public diplomacy efforts. In June 2023, she took part in the 28th edition of the "Nicolae Titulescu" International Courses for Young Diplomats.

➢ **Rim Kap-soo**, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Romania, has been the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Romania since March 2022. He joined the ROK Foreign Service in 1995. His career has largely focused on issues of the Korean Peninsula, non-proliferation and sanctions. His overseas assignments include the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York as well as Embassies in Vienna and Amman. Additionally, he served as senior Non-proliferation Expert at the Safeguards Department of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Prior to arriving in Bucharest, he served as senior

Assistant Secretary to the President on the National Security at the Office of the President and as the Director General of the Korean Peninsula Permanent Peace Regime Bureau at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is the recipient of the President's Distinguished Service Award in 2015 for his commitment and service. A native of Republic of Korea, Ambassador RIM graduated from Seoul National University with a Bachelor's degree in Politics. He earned a post-graduate diploma from the University of Oxford (St. Johns College) and Master's degree in international politics from the London School of Economics (LSE). Author of three books on non-proliferation and sanctions – *Arms Control and Non-proliferation* (2003), *Politics of the UN Security Council Sanctions* (2013) and *Politics of the Economic Sanctions* (2023) –, he received in 2015 President's Distinguished Service Award.

➢ **Fariz Ismailzade** serves as the Director of the Institute for Development and Diplomacy (IDD) and Vice Rector for Government and External Affairs at ADA University. In the 2024 Azerbaijani Parliamentary election, Dr. Ismailzade was elected as a member of the Milli Majlis. Currently, he serves as the Deputy Chairman of the Science and Education Committee and is also a member of the Committee on Foreign and Interparliamentary Relations. At IDD, Dr. Ismailzade plays a key role in shaping the Institute's strategy and overseeing its Annual Action Plan. He actively supports IDD's mission and vision while fostering partnerships with local and international institutions on collaborative programs and projects. Dr. Ismailzade's expertise spans Azerbaijan's foreign policy, relations with neighboring countries, significant historical events in the Caspian region, international terrorism, and public diplomacy.

➢ **Oleksandra Sologub** is an international business strategist and Operational Director at *Nazovni.online*, with over 14 years of experience in management, project management, technical support, negotiations and contracting across Europe and GCC. She specializes in cross-border partnerships, dealing with economic diplomacy, trade missions and export-import relations. Her portfolio includes collaboration with both private and public sectors. Oleksandra holds Master's degrees in International Law and Interpretation and has worked extensively with diplomatic and defense-related institutions. For the past three years, she has been successfully working at *Nazovni.online*, leveraging her expertise to support and empower Ukrainian companies in expanding their export potential.

➢ **Pedro Antonio Argumedo Matamoros** has a solid academic background as an economist from the University of El Salvador, a postgraduate degree in Applied Macroeconomics from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, and a Master's degree in Political Science from the José Simeón Cañas University (UCA). Professionally, he is currently a senior researcher at FUSADES, with more than 20 years of experience in studies on growth, competitiveness and innovation, and the labor market. Previously, he worked for 10 years at the Central Reserve Bank (BCR) as a researcher and coordinator. As a researcher, he has collaborated with a wide range of international organizations, including USAID, ECLAC, JICA, IDRC-Canada, GIZ, IDB, EU, MCC, World Bank, NDI, NATHAN, ITU, and the Think Tank Initiative. Finally, he has taught at the graduate and undergraduate levels at UCA, UDB, UJMD, and ESEN.

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- **Ulf Laessing** runs since December 2021 the regional Sahel program in Mali. He worked previously for 13 years as correspondent and bureau chief for Reuters news agency in the Middle East and Africa focussing on the Arab Spring, conflicts and military missions, political transformations, terrorism and Jihadists as well as migration, business and climate change. Laessing has written a book on Libya's conflict and studied history, Islamic Studies and economics in Hamburg, Leipzig and Kuwait.

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➢ **Raluca Ilie** holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Manchester in Politics and International Relations (BsocSc) and a master's degree in Political Science from Université libre de Bruxelles. She worked as a trainee at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute, as part of the Expertise Provision Directorate. She continued to pursue a traineeship at the European Commission in the Cabinet of the Executive Vice-President for Social Rights, Skills, Quality Jobs, and Preparedness.

➢ **Carmen Prodan** is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Security and Diplomacy at the National School of Political Science and Public Administration (SNSPA), specializing in military affairs, and holding a bachelor's degree in Political Sciences from University of Bucharest. She has gained research experience within the Romanian Diplomatic Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, alongside contributions in the media sector. Carmen has also published in the 2023 edition of *Security, Identity, and Global Hegemony*, in collaboration with the Interdisciplinary Institute of Human Security & Governance (New Delhi, India). Her research primarily focuses on the dynamics of military and economic security.

**Cover 1:**

The Bandung Conference,
Indonesia, April 18-24, 1955

*There is clearly a breakdown in trust between North and South, and between developed and emerging economies.*

António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres,
Secretary-General of The United Nations, 2022

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