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ROMANIA AND RUSSIA SIGNED THE BASIC TREATY: A NEW CHAPTER OF HISTORY OR A RELATION WITHOUT HISTORY?

Ana Dinescu*

Romanian and Russia presidents signed on July 4th 2003 at Moscow the bilateral Treaty after more than ten years of negotiations and less than a year after Romania's invitation to join NATO. The main sensible problems between the two countries, that impeded for a long time the conclusion of that document - the recover of the Romanian Treasure and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact - are included in a separate declaration signed by the Foreign Ministers of the two countries on the same occasion. The Declaration is outlining the need to build up new relations between the two countries, condemning Romania's participation on the side of Hitler's Germany during World War II and made possible the creation of a common commission, including specialists in various fields on both sides - aiming to solve the problem of the Treasure.

Romanian Foreign Minister, Mircea Geoana, considers that the Treaty have not been signed till now because of "inhibition". One year almost he took office, Geoan`, former Romania's ambassador to the US, stated in October 2001: "The history of the relations between the two countries are now surpassed".

The negotiations lasted for more than ten years, and included over 20 rounds of negotiations. Similar documents have been signed by Russia's neighbouring countries or former Eastern and Central European countries since 1992: The Czech Republic on 1 of April, Poland at May 22, and Bulgaria on 4th of August. As an exceptional case, the then Romanian president, Ion Iliescu, accused at the beginning of '90s by the media because of his Soviet past as student in Moscow, signed with the last USSR's president, Mihail Gorbachev, on April 5 1991, a Treaty with the Soviet Union, some months before the collapse of the Soviet Empire. The Treaty never have been ratified.

The negotiations with Russia started in 1993, during another presidential term of Iliescu that now reminded about the Romanian Treasure, transported at Moscow and confiscated by the Soviets in 1917. He also reminded about the Ribbentrop-

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Molotov Pact, from August 1939, according to which Stalin annexed Bessarabia, the actual Republic of Moldova. In both cases, he wanted special clarifications.

In 1996, the Treaty was ready to be signed but, at the last moment, the draft hasn't been agreed by Romania. One of the then provisions stated that the two countries cannot make part from security organisations that can place them on different positions, a provision that, in the foreseeable future was an obstacle to Romania's aim to join NATO, an organisation considered by Russia "obsolete" after the end of the Cold War and directed against its interested, mainly in the Baltic space.

Meanwhile, the geopolitical context changed dramatically. NATO continued its enlargement towards Eastern and Central Europe, getting closer to Russia's borders. A new Russia-NATO Council have been created in 2002 on the basis of the bilateral dialogue in which Moscow and the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation have the possibility to discuss as equal partners problem of common interest. After September 11 terrorists' attacks in Washington and New York, Russia and US became closer partners in the global fight against terrorism. And in Prague, November 2002, Romania, together with other six countries from Central and Eastern Europe have been invited to join NATO. One day after the Prague decision and after a previous meeting with Russian president Vladimir Putin in Sankt Petersburg, US president George W. Bush told the Romanians, in Bucharest, that once part of the North-Atlantic Partnership, Romania can be a "bridge" towards Russia. Political rhetoric's? Possible prospective of what Romania's role will be as a future NATO full member? For a long time after, Bush's discourse have been interpreted in various ways by Romanian and Russian officials. Even at the problematical level: will be able Romania to fulfil the role that US assigned to us? On the Russia side, the signals have been quite clear: we don't need Romania as a bridge to Europe, or to US or whatever other space. At least, Romania may be important for Russia in economic terms, Russian companies already being interested in privatisations in Romania, especially in oil industry, banking sector, steel field and so on. And with or without that Treaty, businesses were and are going "as usual". As a general framework, the Treaty outlined the main mechanisms of cooperation between the two sides. The content of that relations - qualified even too enthusiastic as a "new" one, even if the political elites in power in Moscow and Bucharest are not so "now" for daring to think about mentalities without connections to a recent past are to be established. Maybe history will count lesser. But as long as they will be different versions of history, at the end different or even controversial histories, a healthy and normal present will be impossible. The Treaty can offer the excuse of a kind of dialogue basis between the elites of the two countries.