

ROMANIA – A STABILITY FACTOR BY ASSUMING THE MEDIATOR ROLE IN THE CONFLICTS AT THE BLACK SEA –

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The slowness with which the European Union asserts its role as a mediator in the international sphere must not be Romania's own policy. Many EU member states or organisations have developed their own systems to provide stability as a facilitator for peace processes or have developed early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms. Romania's membership in various external structures enables it to use international expertise in creating and implementing internal structures capable of involving the state in the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Black Sea region or in other areas of the world. The article analyses Romania's potential to act regionally as a mediator and to generate stability and security if such a conflict approach is embraced.

Keywords: early warning; conflict prevention and resolution; mediation; Black Sea area;

INTRODUCTION

Externally, a multitude of states have set as objective their validation as a mediator in the sphere of international relations and, after several decades, I can say that they have proved their efficiency in resolving conflicts. The Black Sea area and the Balkans do not have an established mediator with the exception of Russia, a state that is often not approved precisely because of its policy. Thus, the region has an unoccupied place in which action can be taken, the conflicts specific to this area, which until three decades ago under the tutelage of the Soviet Union, can be best managed by an actor who has gone through related experiences.

ROMANIA AS AN ACTIVE PROMOTER OF THE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES

Romania has been a relevant player in the sphere of international relations through its efforts to preserve peace, prevent and resolve conflicts. On this line, little is known about Romania's external efforts, which are mostly unrecognised officially at international level. Romania relied on the bilateral relations that the Romanian state had cultivated over time through diplomats and politicians with actors in various conflicts, and these created premises for the affirmation of the quality of mediator for our country.

In the first part of the 20th century, Romania's foreign policy was marked by the influence of Take Ionescu and Nicolae Titulescu, diplomatic personalities at European level. It should be noted that the positions constantly expressed were those of peacefully resolving the disputes between states and of the supremacy of law. They frequently spoke out against the revisionist tendencies of some states regarding international treaties.

A supporter and member of the newly established League of Nations (which excluded the war between the means of resolving the disputes between states), Romania supported the non-involvement of other states in the internal politics of the others and fought to resolve the disputes by diplomatic means, through direct talks and negotiations. Romania was at the forefront of regional policy through its strategy of alliances capable of standardising the foreign policy positions within

REGIONAL SECURITY

the Little Entente and later the Balkan Entente (the Balkan Pact, 1934) through which the signatory states guaranteed the integrity of their borders in the Balkans.

Romania's recent history provides data on the mediation, at that time, of the Romanian Minister of Interior, Take Ionescu, who, during the conflicts in the Balkans at the beginning of the 20th century, exercised his good offices and mediated the dispute, actively participating in the negotiations between the Turkish representative and the Greek government. The fact that the mediation was a success at that time is proved by the gratitude of the two states, Take Ionescu also becoming an honorary citizen of Athens as a sign of appreciation for his involvement.

The peace, nonrevisionist policy regarding the borders established in the Balkans after the end of the first world deflagration, the policy of supremacy of international law and the use of peaceful means in resolving disputes were constantly and repeatedly embraced by Nicolae Titulescu and constituted the *red line* of the Romanian foreign policy for decades at that time.

A continuation of the old United Nations Society, the United Nations enshrines in Article 33 of the Charter, the friendly settlement of disputes, including through mediation (The UN Charter, 1945). The UN has permanently sought the solution of amicable settlement of conflicts, the recommendation of mediation for the first time, coming through a Security Council resolution no. 41 of 21.04.1948 in the case of the conflict between India and Pakistan, although other resolutions had previously made this possible. Being an imposed mediation, with rules that could not be fully accepted by both parties, but also with imposed solutions, it turned out that the functioning of this institution was affected, which caused new confrontations between the two states on the issue of Kashmir.

The resolution urged the belligerents to start on the direction of restoring peace with military measures, a second direction being that of imposing a referendum in Kashmir. However, the solution of the referendum was not implemented, and the conflict re-escalated, new resolutions being once more issued by the Security Council.

The foreign policy position of socialist Romania at that time, regarding the non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, having as precursor the political lines of the interwar period, was exposed on the occasion of the initiation of a resolution of the Security Council on the issue of India-Pakistan. In 1962, Romania, as a member of the UN Security Council, together with the USSR, made it clear that the application of old resolutions (including the one on imposed mediation)

was no longer up to date, and arbitration or the organisation of the referendum represented an interference in the internal affairs of the Indian state.

Consistent with the promotion of peace and non-interference in the internal problems of other states, Romania, under the government of the totalitarian communist regime, has developed collaboration relations with other states based on the same diplomatic line, Nicolae Ceaușescu being the spearhead in the regional and not only politics.

Apart from the propagandistic role specific to the regime at that time, is not less true that Nicolae Ceaușescu, in his desire to impose himself internationally as a promoter of peace, a mediator, facilitated a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1977, as revealed by declassified archives and various publications: "*Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu told me that the Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat was ready for a meeting between the representatives of Israel and Egypt. I asked him if it was a meeting between the Egyptian President and me, but he told me that, for now, the meeting was at the level of representatives of the two countries*", former Israeli Prime Minister said in a cabinet meeting.

In fact, without diminishing Romania's role in initiating negotiations between Israel and Egypt, what happened was circumscribed to the good offices that Nicolae Ceaușescu made available to the actors in the conflict in order to negotiate agreements. The result of the actions was seen after a period of time, when Israel and Egypt, through their leaders at that time (with whom Nicolae Ceaușescu had previously met separately, being a means of conveying messages between the Egyptian President and the Israeli Prime Minister) signed the Camp Davis Agreements, on US soil. Choosing another place for negotiations did not diminish Romania's prestige, but it is likely that the US gave other guarantees.

THE CURRENT FRAMEWORK AND ROMANIA'S POSSIBILITIES AS A MEDIATOR

After the fall of the communist bloc and the dissolution of the USSR, Romania did not have externally an activity as visible and recognised as in the 20th century, the 21st century being one of rather slowness in the foreign relations and of engaging the Romanian state in the tumult of foreign policy, often by the rhythm imposed by the great powers. The Strategic Partnership with the USA, the accession to NATO and the EU are huge achievements externally, but in themselves they only partially show the Romanian state as an important external player in the Balkans and in the vicinity of the Black Sea.

The mere invitation, after 1990, to the OSCE's 5+2 format regarding Transnistria did not lead to the recognition of Romania as an important actor in the Black Sea area in a mediation. It should be noted that, although Romania has a pacifist tradition externally, the participation in the Iraq War or the War in Afghanistan has somewhat distorted this aura. If troop participation in the War in Afghanistan is justified from the perspective of NATO membership, the participation in the Iraq War leaves some questions about the issue of the subsequent validation of the intervention by the UN Security Council from the perspective of international law.

With these exceptions, Romania has continued a line in promoting, but without effective implementation, the idea of mediation and amicable settlement of conflicts between states.

The context is a difficult one, in which Russia's current tendencies are to impose its foreign policy agenda in the proximity of the Black Sea. The potentiation of armed confrontations in the former Soviet space in order to then have the opportunity, either as a mediator or as a participant in the negotiations, to freeze these conflicts, is differentiated as a line of Russian foreign policy.

One of the solutions that is within Romania's reach, given the tradition of following a line of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and of promoting the diplomatic settlement of disputes, may be, in the perimeter of the Black Sea and in the Balkans, the consecration of the Romanian state as a provider of stability by developing its capacities to mediate, to provide good offices in case of conflict. It is easy to understand that such a quality is not acquired in a short time, but either at an individual level or as part of a regional convention of the states bordering the Black Sea or in the Balkans, Romania can increase its degree of security through the prestige acquired from such external approaches, precisely because of the relations it can develop starting on this line.

In fact, Romania, recently, has taken several steps in this direction, entering the Group of countries that support mediation¹, along with other states that aim at the same values. Thus, Romania began to outline a foreign policy direction regarding the assumption of a more pronounced role in the field of prevention and resolution of conflicts through mediation, supporting through the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the need to extend under the aegis of the UN mediation not only

¹ The Group of Friends of Mediation was established on 24 September 2010 to promote the use of mediation in peacefully settling disputes, in preventing and ending conflicts, as well as in generating support in the mediation process (United Nations Peacemaker).

with regard to military conflicts, but also to those generated by environmental problems or on resource issues, but also the group co-optation of regional and sub-regional organisations, or non-governmental ones (see The Embassy of Romania to the Hellenic Republic).

Although, in declarations, Romania has expressed firm positions at international level regarding its involvement in the field of international mediation, wishing to get involved in areas other than those in its own proximity where it can claim a direct interest, the simple step of participation in high-level meetings such as the one regarding the strengthening of the role of mediation in the Mediterranean area (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012) is not enough for the recognition as a mediator to become effective.

Obviously, between the expressed public attitude and the power to impose itself regionally as an agreed mediator option, Romania has to take several steps in the near future, both internally and as a member of the EU and NATO.

Thus, at European level, as an EU member, Romania should not be missing from any equation related to the prevention and resolution of conflicts through mediation at regional level and in the proximity of the Black Sea.

If Romania has taken a few steps towards this direction, after 2012, when it manifested itself more strongly in this direction, it is still noted that more is needed. The international political scene has undergone major changes (especially in the context of the new security challenges) in the vicinity of the Black Sea with the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the conflict in eastern Ukraine, but also with the periodic reheating of some frozen conflicts, there are permanently challenges to regional peace and stability, things that indirectly affect the Romanian state in various ways. The same context indicates that Russia acts as a handy mediator, pursuing its own interests with a manipulative and convenient mediation style for its own policy.

The creation of a mediator alternative at the disposal of potential actors in the Black Sea area and in the Balkans can create a counterweight to Russia's mediation offer and ensure that there is a factor of stability, impartial, at the European Union's eastern border and in the vicinity of the Black Sea, which can help to de-escalate conflicts.

The international framework is created, given that, with the General Assembly Resolution (UN, General Assembly, 2016) no. 70/304 of 9 September 2016, the UN expressed its intention to encourage member states to use mediation to prevent

and resolve conflicts. The same resolution urges states to continue to develop their own capacities to mediate, and in order to allow for a professional approach in conducting mediation activities suggests using the United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation developed in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

For its part, the European Union has put forward its own initiatives along the same lines (European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2019 on building the EU's capacity for conflict prevention and mediation [2018/2159(INI)]), which aimed to increase institutional capacity including through the establishment, under the authority of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), a high-level EU advisory council on conflict prevention and mediation, as well as a specialised working group of the Council on Conflict Prevention and Mediation.

At the same time, the establishment of a specialised division on conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation tools within the European External Assistance Service confirms the EU's current trend towards development in this line. At the beginning of the road, the specialised division is structured on two levels, the first being early warning and conflict prevention, and the second is aimed at mediation and dialogue for peace. Although this division may present an establishment plan, we appreciate that in the current context it is insufficiently potentiated and supported.

Romania still has public positions at the level of government representatives on mediation issues, but it is necessary to build on such a line an edifice of diplomacy through mediation and imposition as a mediator in the international sphere.

CHALLENGES TO ROMANIA AS A POTENTIAL MEDIATOR

Romania can present advantages as a mediator for various actors in conflicts in the Black Sea region and in the Balkans precisely because of its geostrategic position in the region, it can be a guarantor of regional security as long as through its tradition of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states it represents a *red line* that has crossed the history of the last hundred years.

Romania's external credibility is growing precisely due to its membership in various mediation structures under the aegis of the UN, and the confirmation of Romania's effort came through the voice of the UN Deputy Secretary-General who mentioned our country's contribution to promoting mediation (see Ministry of Foreign Affairs – 2).

The ability to be perceived as an impartial mediator is related to the balance that Romania's foreign policy imprints in international relations. In this context, certain less inspired decisions such as that of publicly supporting Israel's initiative to move its capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, even if a strategic partner such as the US has manifested itself in this regard, may crumble the fragile edifice on which the image of a mediator can be built, to be perceived as impartial. Although mediation or good offices may be offered, the ability of the state to be perceived as an impartial mediator is not only a matter of external manifestation at the public level, membership in various organizations, but it should be proven from the outset so that the degree of trust of the actors involved in the conflict to be raised.

In international mediation, a basic element is to increase the trust in the mediator and in the procedure. In my opinion, the attainment of that desideratum is a matter of meeting two requirements. The first requirement is related to the acquisition of an initial, general, high enough degree of trust to allow Romania to be taken into account as a potential mediator when mediation is either requested or offered. Fulfilling the second one is about how we have the ability to satisfy at least at a minimal level some of the expectations of the actors in the conflict from the very first contacts. Stating that the fulfilment of this second requirement is more related to the peculiarities of the actors and the typical of the conflict, the acquisition of a general, pre-defined degree of trust is related to the foreign policy lines, the international image, the affirmation and assumption of the role of mediator in the sphere of international relations.

In general, the adoption of a policy of strengthening bilateral relations with the Balkan and Black Sea states may lead to increased confidence. Moreover, Romania, based on the existing relations, could offer its good offices in the first phase in various conflicts likely to damage the relations between states, or to affect democracy. It is not imperative that Romania's involvement be only in the role of mediator, but the good offices initially offered are precursors of possible mediations. In addition, the conflict must not necessarily have a military component or be interstate, but may be small in the sense of the international community. Such a dispute can be stressful enough for a state in the region, and Romania's involvement as a mediator could be viewed with confidence by actors, if considered reliable, with a prepared logistics, with advanced knowledge of the concrete situation in the zonal context.

The right question is why would Romania be chosen and not another state in the region?

There are pros and cons to such an option if we look at it from the perspective of a conflicting actor. Romania, as a solid, democratic state with a high stability compared to many states in the proximity of the Black Sea and in the Balkans, offers a comparative advantage in terms of the possibilities to provide good offices or to mediate a conflict, and the preparation of an optimal framework for such discussions is at hand. The advantage is that Romania offers a high degree of security, and hosting in the past the NATO Summit in 2008 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs – 3) is a sufficient argument, in our opinion, to be elected as a host for discussions.

Obviously, the first condition for Romania to be part of the multitude of options to become the host of discussions, is a logistical training capable of conferring and guaranteeing the actors that on our territory they are safe. A second condition of utmost importance is determined by the way Romania builds the body of specialists in the diplomatic and mediation area, by the way in which this body is promoted and supported.

The EU membership, the only state in the SE Europe in the top 10 in terms of size and population, the NATO membership and especially the Strategic Partnership with the US for over 10 years can be solid arguments.

On the other hand, the perpetual problem of corruption and the lack of the Schengen space can be arguments that could grind credibility.

Membership in the Group of States supporting mediation may be an argument because only Turkey, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic still hold this quality in the area. With the exception of Turkey, which may be an important competitor, the other States cannot represent a viable option on various criteria in my analysis, either due to proximity or foreign policy, or lack of advantages of being able to present itself as a solid guarantor of a possible agreement. Turkey, however, has several specific characteristics, being at the same time an initiator of the Group of States supporting mediation. The latter have an advantage, but if we refer to Turkey's last-minute position in which its foreign policy denotes rapprochement with Russia, the options of this state are limited, to which is added the lack of EU membership.

Because it is much closer to the countries near the Black Sea and the Balkans, because we are bound by a tradition of bilateral relations with these countries, because the Romanian state is a fine observer of the political-military developments in the region, Romania has the advantage that it can choose exactly the so-called *ripe moment* (Zartman, 2008). Choosing the right moment of the intervention is an essential element in initiating discussions, when the actors are prepared to find

a solution to the conflict with effects on the success of the approaches, and from this perspective Romania is able to impose itself precisely because of its geostrategic position. The ways of approaching the actors obviously may differ from case to case, but once the right moment is identified, Romania should have the organisational, logistical capacity to be able to provide that favourable framework for discussions, whether it provides its good offices or is chosen as a mediator.

Assuming that Romania is territorially identifiable, logically as a viable option in hosting discussions, these minimal elements are not enough to impose yourself. There is a need to establish strategies on directions and methods of conflict resolution, whether we are referring to good offices or mediation. We believe we have arguments at the moment to offer good offices, even if we are not mediators, and this could be a first step.

In order to strengthen such a quality, institutional involvement is needed, and some of the state entities that can initiate and maintain international relations need to set a common direction on this line. For example, a European Parliament instrument conventionally called the *Jean Monnet Dialogue* has been developed at European Union level since 2016, aimed at strengthening the capacity of leaders to inter-party dialogue in order to develop democratic and trustworthy parliamentary culture. The *Jean Monnet Dialogue* comes very close to mediation as a tool for resolving disputes, although it is not traditionally such an instrument, but rather a facilitator. This tool, with its nine rules (*Ibid*), one of which makes direct reference to the possibility of applying mediation procedures, can be an option for Romania. The success of the *Jean Monnet Dialogue* (*Ibid*) in Ukraine and Northern Macedonia shows that, near the Black Sea and in the Balkans, there are problems that can be managed with the help of a third party. The fact that part of the *Jean Monnet Dialogue* sessions have taken place on the territory of other states may be an opportunity for Romania to host such meetings.

In the UN's view (Directives des Nations Unis, 2012), a mediator capable of successfully managing a conflict should have a certain rank and weight commensurate with the size of the conflict.

Romania's capacity to be a neutral and impartial mediator must be seen through the prism of what it represents, namely a democratic state with specific characteristics. In a context where the dimensions of a dispute can be varied, a mediator's ability to be neutral is an unknown. Neutrality (Faget, 2008, p. 310) is influenced by the mediator's own values, being known that in the international

sphere that such a posture is difficult to achieve and as long as Romania has as values the respect for democracy and the supremacy of international law can only be tributary to them. Instead, impartiality can be respected as long as Romania's interest is and remains the preservation of a climate of peace and security in the region. Romania cannot embrace the quality of partisan mediator as it has been done in some cases highlighted by the specialized literature (Svensson, 2009, . 466-469) because such a posture would not only not be characteristic but also for the simple fact that it is closer to the mediation style of the great powers. As in the region, this partisan style of mediation characterises Russia in a special way, in this context, Romania cannot assert itself on this line. In the context in which impartiality is an important feature for the success of mediation, Romania can only display this aspect to gain the trust of the actors precisely on this line. If impartiality is also doubled by neutrality, as much as it is possible in international relations, the chances of Romania becoming a successful mediator increase.

On the other hand, it may be a question of what style of mediation would suit Romania better, but of the three known styles, the formulative and communicative styles would suit her best. The third, manipulative one is rather the prerogative of the great powers that can dispose of resources, although we cannot exclude ourselves from the first moment. If we refer to the intensity of the differences, the manipulative style fits in the conflicts of high intensity (Bercovitch, 1997, pp. 125-153). As in the area of the Black Sea and the Balkans, the involvement of a great power as an actor interested in disputes such as those in Ukraine or Georgia is known Romania cannot, at least for the moment, approach on its own the resolution of these disputes. In fact, the choice of mediation strategy depends on the characteristics of the dispute, its intensity and maturity, and from this perspective, Romania, as a country in the proximity of the Black Sea and the Balkans, is suitable to be able to take the best decisions on this issue.

An extremely important aspect is the chances that an agreement will be reached in a mediation carried out by Romania. On the other hand, the quality of the agreement is also given by the implementation mechanisms. Of course, the aspect of an agreement, like the entire mediation, is also related to the aspect of the mandate that Romania could have. In any case, as long as the UN principles on mediation are respected, the chances of an agreement or agreements aimed at ending the conflict are high. However, the viability of the agreement depends on the way in which it is subsequently implemented and on the implementation

mechanisms, and if the provisions of the agreement also involve financial or other mechanisms, then surely Romania should have ensured in advance that there is a willingness to consume resources, even by third parties or by itself.

CONCLUSIONS

From the point of view of the advantages Romania would derive, if it adopted a foreign policy line in establishing itself as a mediator in the sphere of international relations, we can conclude that respect and prestige can be high. Gaining respect in the Black Sea area and in the Balkans could make it easier to open closed doors for our foreign policy. By detecting in time and getting involved in the settlement of disputes through diplomatic channels, Romania would become a factor of balance, a factor of stability in the area.

On the other hand, the fact that Romania would be involved in resolving zonal disputes can only position it as an actor worthy of consideration in international negotiations, a well-deserved recognition of its role and importance not only from a geopolitical point of view.

The comparative advantage that can be acquired directly through this mechanism can impose Romania as a stable state on the world map and as a safe target for investments from other areas. As long as Romania is seen as a factor and providing stability, there are premises for strong states or international organisations to want to enhance this capacity with all that it can mean from a socio-economic point of view.

Another advantage can be the avoidance of the social consequences that a conflict produces, from the flow of immigrants to the trafficking of weapons, prohibited substances and people. Avoiding organised crime that is increasing in conflict zones and that directly or indirectly affects a state with which Romania has trade or causes increases in economic crime on the territory of Romania itself are elements that can be advantages, in addition to avoiding additional costs that involve the fight with cross-border organised crime.

In addition to the advantage of proximity localization, consecration as a mediator can make Romania not only an interesting state from a strictly geostrategic point of view or a market for products from Western Europe. Romania can be that state that presents great advantages and opportunities, and will be seen as a bridge for the enlargement of the EU and NATO to the east with all the socio-economic consequences that such a posture can have.

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