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Romania-U.S. Strategic Partnership: Past Experience and Future Outlook

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Ambassador Adrian Vierita:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor for me to be invited here today and to have the chance to talk about the strategic partnership between Romania and the United States. Let me maybe start with the beginning. The beginning was the year of 1990. The beginning because was the year of change, not only for Romania but for important parts of Europe. And in 1990, after the collapse of the communist regime in Romania, we were confronted with new challenges. Historic challenges because Romania was a democracy until 1938 when it became a kingdom. This was when the king of Romania installed the first royal dictatorship. Soon after the Second World War, another dictatorship was imposed on Romania. Romania was like a man in a forest without an orientation system, and had to be able to confront the various crises in an eternal crisis. So, it was important to understand the international environment and the European environment.

This started a very fascinating period in Europe which brought so many changes to Romania and our neighbors. I think that first we came to the conclusion that not only the Cold War was over and the post-Cold War period was starting, but we were feeling that something maybe more important was unfolding, but not knowing exactly what. After the Soviet Union collapsed, it became more obvious for us. We have to change some security paradigms and some security concepts. We recognized that the security concept before the end of the Cold War was more linked to strategic interaction, and more linked to power rivalries. The new emerging strategic concept was more focused on society, focusing more on social and economic interdependences and on resource scarcity. It also added to the traditional military dimension of security, and other dimensions including the social dimension, economic dimension, and ecological dimension.

After 1990, in spite of all the changes in the domestic political landscape, the Romanian foreign policy has remained the same, mainly focused on NATO and EU accession. I remember once I was invited to be interviewed by the foreign relations committee in the Romanian parliament, and I was asked what the driving force behind the foreign policy of Romania is, and I said it was the desire to improve the living standards of the Romanian people. Some of them were relatively happy with this answer, yet still they asked me, "what about security?" So I said security is okay. We have a strategic partnership with the United States. We are a NATO member. And at the time we were on our way to becoming an EU member. And I said I think we have good reason to continue.

Coming back in the early nineties, the direction was not obvious, not the direction of Romania but the direction of the world. We in Romania were taken by surprise by the changes, we were taken by surprise by the collapse of the Soviet Union, for instance. It was a kind of instinct that saved us, it was the instinct of belonging to the democratic family, it was the instinct of belonging to the Atlantic area. It was the kind of instinct which taught us to turn to our western friends and partners. And here the United States has played a crucial role because we understood that not only is our security linked with the United States, but we share the same democratic values, and based on these values we would act together, cooperate, and achieve common goals and have common interests. The assistance and the help from the United States was fundamentally important for our

society, for the changes. It was not easy because since 1990, we have gone a long way, a rocky way sometimes, but we remained confident. We remained confident that we could become a democratic society. We could return to the family where we've always felt that we belonged to and we could also make our contribution in our region, to see stability and wealth being features of the region.

When you ask the question to which region does Romania belong, you can receive different answers. Romania is part of central Europe but at the same time, it is a Black Sea country. Romania is a part of southeastern Europe and at the same time is a member of all structures of regional cooperation in the Balkans. So geography's important. But it's very important not to lose much time trying to answer questions, although they may be interesting questions because geography influences the geopolitical environment. But I think what is important for Romania is to believe in this transatlantic destiny and to believe in the strategic partnership with the United States. To believe that it can become a European country, a member of the European Union, to believe it can play a role in its region, irrespective of the name of the region.

Chronologically, Romania wanted to become a NATO member but couldn't join in the first wave. But in 1997, we concluded a strategic partnership with the United States which was important because it was something more tangible and it was something that was perceived as a strong commitment from the United States.. Then, a few years after, we started negotiations with the European Union and I think it is important to mention that the partnership with the United States helped us during the time of negotiations because we benefited from a different kind of expertise coming from the United States and of course from the political support.

The fact is that some years later, we joined NATO in 2004, we joined the EU in 2007, and we have asked ourselves again, "What's next?" The same question which was on everybody's lips in 1990 has come again but now in a totally different environment, in a totally different context, and since 2007 we have tried to develop our foreign policy based on basically three pillars. One pillar is the transatlantic pillar. We strongly believe that the transatlantic relationship is the bedrock of the cooperation between Europe and United States and here we have two basic approaches. One is NATO and cooperation with the United States within NATO and of course, with the rest of our allies, and the bilateral cooperation. Bilateral cooperation is very important and has been proven in various parts of the world. One example of this would be military cooperation, as seen in different theaters starting with Kosovo, ending with Afghanistan. This also helped us to reform our military and I know that some people in Bucharest may disagree with me but I think that one of the most important success stories that we have achieved in these years was the reform of the military. One month ago, NATO opened a center of excellence in Romania on human intelligence and these are developments that could be integrated with this other paradigm, the second pillar of the foreign policies of the European Union. We are interested in seeing the Union having a voice in international affairs, and we are also interested in seeing the Union be an active partner of the United States. And at the same time, Romania and Bulgaria being the newest members we would also like to consolidate our role in the European Union, and one of the avenues we walk is advocating the idea of a strong trans-Atlantic partnership with the United States. The third pillar is that the region is a very complex one with a lot of challenges. You may agree that there is still unfinished business in the Balkans, you may agree that the Black Sea region is a very

interesting region, very diverse with various interests. In the enlarged Black Sea region we have countries belonging to different structures. We have NATO members, we have EU members, we have countries aspiring to become NATO and EU members. We have countries where this issue is not a priority. The Black Sea region is a region which neighbors the Middle East and Central Asia regions. Regions which are extremely important for the rest of the world. And a region which has to face a lot of challenges, frozen conflicts, energy security, organized crime, trafficking in all kinds, even human beings, and terrorism. And at the same time it is very important to have a political will in this region so that we can work together to give some urgent answers to these challenges. And here the partnership with the United States is essential.

Let's take the example of energy security. We have witnessed last year a gas crisis, we have witnessed a lot of discussions regarding energy, we have witnessed the different projects, maybe boat projects, energy projects in the region and this is something which is related to the security concept I was talking about at the beginning of my presentation. This is very much linked to the security not only of Romania, but to the security of the countries in the region. And we partner with the United States in promoting the concept of the Southern Corridor and we hope it is successful with some support from Brussels in advancing on various projects within the concept of the corridor. I cannot refrain from talking about the elephant in the room which made headlines some weeks ago, it was the decision of Romania to accept the offer of the United States to plug into the missile defense system. This was a natural development of the partnership between Romania and the United States. I would like to end my remarks by saying that there are three words which could characterize the partnership between Romania and the United States. Predictability is one word. Predictability because in this period of twenty years it was predictable for Romania to have a good relation with the United States, to conclude a partnership with the United States. The second word is continuity. Continuity because it was a continuation of efforts which started in 1990 and that irrespective of the government in Romania, partnership with the United States was a constant priority. The third phrase is long-term commitment. Romania is committed on the long term to strengthen this partnership, to be a staunch ally of the United States and to continue the wonderful history of Romanian-American relations, diplomatic relations which started exactly 130 years ago.