

Romania: Background and U.S. Relations

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Romania: Background and U.S. Relations

Romania is a country in southeastern Europe with a population of nearly 20 million. After the end of communist rule in Romania in 1989, the United States and Romania developed close bilateral relations, including a strategic partnership launched in 1997. The United States supported Romania's economic and democratic transition, as well as its accession to NATO in 2004 and the European Union (EU) in 2007.

U.S. officials under successive presidential Administrations have described Romania as a steadfast ally and a strong proponent of transatlantic cooperation. For years, Romania has sought to elevate Black Sea security as a strategic priority within NATO and the EU. The country's Euro-Atlantic orientation and Black Sea location have made it an important partner in addressing U.S. foreign and security policy concerns in Europe and other regions. Romania's role in deterrence and defense along NATO's eastern flank increased following Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and full-scale invasion in 2022. Within NATO and the EU, Romania has the longest border with Ukraine.

For decades, the U.S.-Romania relationship has generally had broad support within Congress. Deteriorating security in the Black Sea region, particularly since 2022, has driven increased congressional interest in Romania and the broader region. Some Members have engaged through delegations visiting Romania and through participation in the House Romania Caucus and interparliamentary platforms. In the 117th and 118th Congress, some Members introduced legislation concerning the U.S.-Romania strategic partnership (e.g., H.Res. 1222 in the 117th); Romania's entry into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (e.g., S. 814 in the 118th); and U.S. policy toward the Black Sea region (e.g., H.R. 6367/S. 3407 in the 117th; H.R. 1680/S. 804 in the 118th). Congress enacted provisions relating to Black Sea policy in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2024 (P.L. 118-31) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328 and accompanying explanatory statement).

The 119th Congress may weigh whether and how to shape U.S.-Romania bilateral relations using its oversight and legislative prerogatives. Topics that may be of interest to the 119th Congress include the following:

- **Security.** U.S.-Romania security cooperation encompasses joint trainings and exercises; U.S. access to military facilities in Romania; rotational deployments of U.S. troops to Romania under Operation Atlantic Resolve; Romania's hosting on its territory of a U.S. Aegis Ashore missile defense system; Romania's cooperation with the Alabama National Guard under the U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program; and defense consultations. Congress has authorized and appropriated assistance used to support Romania's military modernization, infrastructure, and interoperability with NATO forces. Over the past decade, Romania has invested in U.S. weapons and equipment as part of its defense modernization and in Romanian military facilities used by U.S. and NATO forces.
- **Energy.** U.S. engagement with Romania on energy has grown in recent years, and civil nuclear energy was an area of close cooperation under the first Trump Administration and the Biden Administration. Since 2022, Romania's natural gas and electricity infrastructure and supplies have helped support the energy security of neighboring Moldova and Ukraine.
- **Political Situation.** In November 2024, Romania's political scene grew contentious following the unexpected victory of a far-right, populist candidate in the first round of the presidential election. Romania's Constitutional Court subsequently annulled the presidential election amid allegations it had been compromised by social media manipulation (primarily on TikTok) and electoral law violations, as well as concerns about possible Russian interference. A new election is scheduled for May 2025.

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Introduction and Issues for Congress

Romania is a country in southeastern Europe with a population of nearly 20 million (see **Figure 1** for map). Romania joined NATO in 2004 and the European Union (EU) in 2007. The country's Euro-Atlantic orientation and Black Sea location have made it an important partner in addressing U.S. foreign and security policy concerns in Europe and other regions. Romania's military facilities have supported NATO and U.S.-led missions in the Middle East and Europe, and Romania hosts one of two Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems that the United States contributes to NATO BMD in Europe. Romania's role in NATO deterrence and defense expanded when Russia first invaded Ukraine (Romania's neighbor) in 2014 and in the wake of Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since 2022, Romania has bolstered the energy security of both Ukraine and Moldova, aided Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, facilitated Ukrainian grain exports through Romanian river and Black Sea ports, and served as a logistical hub for international support to Ukraine.

Beginning in November 2024, Romania's political scene grew contentious following the unexpected victory of far-right, populist candidate Călin Georgescu in the first round of the presidential election. Romania's Constitutional Court subsequently annulled the presidential election amid allegations it had been compromised by social media manipulation (primarily on TikTok) and electoral law violations, and concerns about possible Russian interference. An ongoing criminal investigation into Georgescu may affect his prospects to compete in the presidential election scheduled for May 2025.

Deteriorating security in the Black Sea region, particularly since 2022, has driven greater congressional interest in Romania, and U.S.-Romania relations may be of interest to some Members of the 119th Congress. Areas of potential congressional oversight and legislation include U.S. security assistance and cooperation with Romania, bilateral cooperation on energy, and Romania's role in Black Sea security. Members also may assess implementation of Black Sea strategy requirements enacted in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2024 (§1247 of P.L. 118-31) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (§7019(e) of P.L. 117-328 and accompanying statement).

Romania: Basic Facts

Population: 19.05 million (2021)

Land Area: 92,043 square miles (similar to Oregon)

Ethnicity: 89.3% Romanian; 6% Hungarian; 3.4% Roma; 0.3% Ukrainian; 0.1% German; 0.9% other

Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 2024 est.: \$380.56 billion; per capita GDP approximately \$20,090

Political Leaders: *President:* Ilie Bolojan (interim); *Prime Minister:* Marcel Ciolacu; *Foreign Minister:* Emil Hurezeanu; *Defense Minister:* Angel Tîlvăr

Sources: International Monetary Fund, "World Economic Outlook Database," October 2024; Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook*; Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2021 Population Census.

Political Overview

Romania is a parliamentary republic with a semi-presidential system of government. A directly elected president is the head of state and the supreme commander of the Armed Forces. The president also has some responsibilities in domestic and foreign affairs. The prime minister leads the government. Romania's bicameral parliament includes a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate.

Klaus Iohannis, whose second and final term as president expired in December 2024, initially remained in office following the Romanian Constitutional Court's December 6, 2024, decision to annul Romania's presidential election (a new election has been called for May 2025). On

February 10, 2025, facing a potential impeachment procedure in parliament, Iohannis announced his resignation. Romanian Senate leader Ilie Bolojan assumed duties as interim president.

Marcel Ciolacu has served as prime minister since 2023; Ciolacu's Social Democratic Party (PSD) has governed in coalition with the National Liberal Party (PNL) since late 2021. PSD and PNL are Romania's largest center-left and center-right parties, respectively. The PSD-PNL coalition has been relatively durable, despite the parties' historical rivalry and policy differences. After Romania's December 1, 2024, parliamentary election, PSD and PNL formed a new coalition government with the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), with Ciolacu remaining prime minister.

Figure 1. Romania



Source: Map created by the Congressional Research Service.

Annulment of the 2024 Presidential Election

Romania's political situation has been volatile since late 2024. Călin Georgescu, a relatively little-known candidate who campaigned mostly on social media and reported zero campaign expenses, unexpectedly won the most votes (22.9%) in the first round of the presidential election on November 24, 2024.¹ Georgescu had polled below 1% in early November, about 6% in mid-November, and about 11% in final preelection polls.² Some observers assessed that Georgescu's statements praising 20th century Romanian fascist leaders and Russian President Vladimir Putin—as well as remarks conveying skepticism of NATO, Ukrainian statehood, Romanian support for Ukraine, and aspects of U.S.-Romania security cooperation—appeared to be at odds with

¹ Permanent Electoral Authority, press release, November 24, 2024, <https://www.roaep.ro/prezentare/comunicat-de-presa/comunicat-de-presa-privind-veniturile-si-cheltuielile-efectuate-de-competitorii-electorali-la-alegerile-pentru-presedintele-romaniei-din-data-de-24-noiembrie-2024/>.

² Poll figures from intelligence documents declassified by the president of Romania on December 4, 2024. See Supreme Council of National Defense, press release, December 4, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/comunicate-de-presa/comunicat-de-presa1733327193>.

Romania's Euro-Atlantic orientation.³ Although Georgescu denies ties to Russia and says he supports Romania's NATO and EU memberships, some observers assess that some of his rhetoric on the West, NATO, and Ukraine resembles Russian narratives.⁴ Another unexpected outcome in the first round was the failure of Prime Minister Ciolacu—who appeared to be the frontrunner in polls—to reach the runoff round. Instead, Georgescu was to face Elena Lasconi, leader of the pro-European opposition party Save Romania Union (USR). The election results drew scrutiny to the late-campaign surge of pro-Georgescu content on social media (in particular TikTok), the Georgescu campaign's compliance with Romanian electoral laws, TikTok's responsiveness to concerns raised by Romanian election authorities, and allegations of Russian efforts to influence the information space in Romania and weaken social cohesion.⁵

On December 6, 2024—two days before the runoff between Georgescu and Lasconi was to be held—Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the presidential election, finding that multiple irregularities and electoral law violations had compromised its integrity.⁶ The court's decision drew from newly declassified Romanian intelligence reports describing a large-scale online effort to aggressively promote Georgescu's candidacy ahead of the first round. The online campaign, according to the reports, was coordinated on Telegram and Discord channels, backed by a state actor, and largely carried out on TikTok, where paid influencers and networks of accounts amplified content and hashtags associated with Georgescu's candidacy.⁷ Some content appeared to violate Romanian electoral law requirements that political campaign material be labeled as such, resulting in Georgescu's preferential visibility on TikTok. The reports also said that Romania's electoral websites and systems experienced over 85,000 cyberattacks close to or on election day, likely backed by a state actor.⁸ Elsewhere, the reports described growing Russian hybrid threats targeting Romania (see below, "Black Sea Security and Russia") and pointed to seeming similarities between the coordinated social media campaign in Romania's election and alleged interference cases in Moldova and Ukraine attributed to Russia.

The reports' findings spurred investigations into individuals and financing allegedly behind the digital campaign, as well as into Georgescu's compliance with Romanian campaign finance and other electoral laws.⁹ Prompted in part by developments in Romania, the EU announced a formal

³ Stephen McGrath and Vadim Ghirda, "Romania's Surprise Front-Runner Says He's Not Pro-Russia. But Romania Alleges He Had Moscow's Help," Associated Press, December 4, 2024; Clara Volintiru, "The Well-Known Unknown," German Marshall Fund of the United States, November 27, 2024; Luiza Ilie, Lili Bayer, and Andrew Gray, "Who Is Calin Georgescu, the Man at the Centre of Romania's Cancelled Election?," Reuters, December 6, 2024; and Maya Mehara, "Ukraine Called 'Fictional State' by European Presidential Candidate," *Newsweek*, January 30, 2025. On the Holocaust in Romania, see International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, November 11, 2004, <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20080226-romania-commission-executive-summary.pdf>.

⁴ Laura Kayali and Giovanna Coi, "Why Romania's Presidential Vote Could Shake NATO," *Politico Europe*, December 4, 2024 (hereinafter Kayali and Coi, "Romania's Presidential Vote"); and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, "Comment by MFA Spokesperson Heorhii Tykhyi on Calin Georgescu's Provocative Statements," January 30, 2025.

⁵ Supreme Council of National Defense, press release, November 28, 2024, <https://csat.presidency.ro/ro/comuni/sedinta-consiliului-suprem-de-aparare-a-tarii1732806302>.

⁶ Constitutional Court of Romania, "Decision No. 32," December 6, 2024, https://www.ccr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Hotarare_32_2024.pdf. Days earlier, the court had validated the first-round results after the narrow margin between Lasconi and Ciolacu prompted a recount.

⁷ Supreme Council of National Defense, press release, December 4, 2024.

⁸ Supreme Council of National Defense, press release, December 4, 2024; and Carmen Paun, "Romania's Security Chiefs Confirm Election Cyberattacks, Request TikTok Probe," *Politico Europe*, November 28, 2024.

⁹ Tim Ross and Andrei Popoviciu, "Prosecutors Raid Properties of Key Georgescu Backer in Romania Election Probe," (continued...)

inquiry into TikTok over a potential breach of the bloc's Digital Services Act, which has the stated aim of preventing harmful online activity and disinformation.¹⁰ The inquiry is to focus on management of risks to elections or civic discourse in relation to TikTok's recommender systems and on TikTok's policies on political advertising and paid political content.

Prime Minister Ciolacu said the Constitutional Court's decision to annul the election was "the only correct solution after the declassification of the documents,... which show that the result of the Romanians' vote was blatantly distorted as a result of Russia's intervention."¹¹ Then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken and some European policymakers expressed support for Romania's institutions and concern about reports of Russian interference.¹² Other analysts, while not disputing the gravity of the situation, nevertheless have said that the election's annulment may deepen Romanians' distrust of democratic processes and galvanize further support for anti-system narratives.¹³ Some who hold this view also suggest that, alongside any impacts from digital manipulation and electoral law violations, Georgescu's victory in the first round also reflects genuine voter dissatisfaction with Romania's governing parties. Georgescu and Lasconi, among others, questioned the Constitutional Court's impartiality and/or the underlying intelligence evidence.¹⁴ The two candidates welcomed U.S. Vice President JD Vance's comments about Romania in his February 14, 2025, speech at the Munich Security Conference, in which he described the election annulment as "based on the flimsy suspicions of an intelligence agency and enormous pressure from [Romania's] continental neighbors."¹⁵

Politico Europe, December 7, 2024; and Nicolae Bian and Florin Marinescu, "Exclusive: The Russian Connections of Călin Georgescu's Security Team—Ties to Wagner Group, the Russian Embassy, and Chechen Leader Ramzan Kadyrov," *G4 Media*, February 26, 2025 (hereinafter Bian and Marinescu, "Georgescu's Security Team").

¹⁰ European Commission, "Commission Opens Formal Proceedings Against TikTok on Election Risks Under the Digital Services Act," December 16, 2024.

¹¹ Sarah Rainsford, "Romanian Court Annuls Result of Presidential Election First Round," BBC, December 6, 2024. Also see Valentina Pop, "Russian Election Meddling 'Nearly Impossible' to Prove, Says Romania's President," *Financial Times*, December 19, 2024.

¹² U.S. Mission to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), "Plenary Statement 31st OSCE Ministerial Council, Valletta, Malta," December 5, 2024; U.S. Department of State, "Statement on Romania's Presidential Elections," December 4, 2024, <https://ro.usembassy.gov/romania-presidential-elections/>; United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Affairs David Lammy (@DavidLammy), X post, December 7, 2024, <https://x.com/DavidLammy/status/1865331777323024475>; German Foreign Office (@GermanDiplo), X post, December 5, 2024, <https://x.com/GermanyDiplo/status/1864693922833785260>; Agence France-Presse, "Macron Expresses Concern over European Elections in New Year Speech," January 1, 2024; and French Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs, "Publication of the VIGINUM Report on Information Manipulation," February 5, 2025.

¹³ Oana Popescu-Zamfir, "Romania's Election Crisis: A Stark Warning for NATO Nations on Russian Meddling," European Council on Foreign Relations, December 10, 2024; Alexandru Damian, "The Annulment of Romania's Presidential Election Reflects Both Foreign Meddling and Domestic Failures," London School of Economics, December 13, 2024; Mark Gitenstein, "Romania's Agony," *EU Observer*, February 10, 2025; and Kamil Calus, "Romania: Constitutional Court Annuls the Election," OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, December 9, 2024.

¹⁴ Irina Marica, "Romania's Far-Right Călin Georgescu and George Simion Protest Presidential Election Annulment at Closed Polling Stations," *Romania Insider*, December 9, 2024; Keno Verseck, "What Next for Romania After Its Recent Electoral Chaos?," *DeutscheWelle*, December 20, 2024; and Victor Goury-Laffont, "Report Ties Romanian Liberals to TikTok Campaign That Fueled Pro-Russia Candidate," *Politico Europe*, December 21, 2024.

¹⁵ Vance further stated, "Now, as I understand it, the argument was that Russian disinformation had infected the Romanian elections, but I'd ask my European friends to have some perspective. You can believe it's wrong for Russia to buy social media advertisements to influence your elections. We certainly do.... But if your democracy can be destroyed with a few hundred thousand dollars of digital advertising from a foreign country, then it wasn't very strong to begin with." From Christina Lu, "Transcript: The Speech That Stunned Europe," *Foreign Policy*, February 18, 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/02/18/vance-speech-munich-full-text-read-transcript-europe/>. Also see Catalina Mihai, "Vance's Munich Speech Sparks Mixed Reactions in Bucharest," *Euractiv*, February 17, 2025.

A new presidential election has been called for May 2025. The first round is scheduled for May 4, with a runoff on May 18 if no candidate wins over 50% of the vote. Polling in January 2025 indicated that Georgescu is the frontrunner, with higher support (around 38%) than in his first-round results.¹⁶ He is backed by the largest far-right party in Romania, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians.¹⁷ A potential new candidate is Bucharest Mayor Nicușor Dan, who has announced his intention to compete as an independent, pro-European candidate. Governing coalition parties PSD, PNL, and UDMR agreed to back former PNL leader Crin Antonescu.¹⁸ Given the Romanian president's role in foreign affairs and security (including representing Romania at NATO and EU leader summits), the outcome of the May 2025 election may have implications for U.S., NATO, and EU interests.¹⁹

As of late February 2025, Georgescu's potential candidacy in the May 2025 election is uncertain. On February 26, 2025, the Prosecutor's Office attached to the Romanian High Court of Cassation and Justice announced a criminal investigation into Georgescu relating to six alleged offenses: incitement of actions against the constitutional order; sharing of false information; false statements regarding electoral campaign financing; connection to an organization with a fascist, racist, or xenophobic character; public promotion of persons convicted of crimes of genocide and war crimes and extremist discourse; and connection to an organization with an antisemitic character.²⁰ According to preliminary media reports, police raids conducted alongside Georgescu's questioning "documented multiple connections between Călin Georgescu's entourage and Russia" and reportedly uncovered ammunition, weapons, and over \$1 million in cash in possession of a former mercenary leader described as a close associate to Georgescu.²¹ Georgescu accused the authorities of fabricating evidence as pretext to bar his candidacy in the election.²²

December 2024 Parliamentary Election

Romania held a parliamentary election on December 1, 2024—one week after the first round of the presidential election. No major concerns were raised about the integrity of the parliamentary election. PSD placed first overall in elections to both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, with around 22% of votes (a drop from its roughly 29% share in the 2020 parliamentary

¹⁶ Reuters, "Romanian Far-Right Presidential Candidate Leads in Polls Ahead of May Vote," January 21, 2025.

¹⁷ Catalina Mihai, "Romanian Far-Right AUR Backs Pro-Russian Candidate Georgescu," *Euractiv*, January 23, 2025 (hereinafter Mihai, "Romanian Far-Right AUR Backs Pro-Russian Candidate Georgescu").

¹⁸ Ketrin Jochecová, "Bucharest Mayor Enters Romanian Presidential Race," *Politico Europe*, December 16, 2024; Irina Marica, "Ruling Parties Unite Under Romania's Forward Alliance to Back Crin Antonescu's Presidential Bid," *Romania Insider*, February 13, 2025.

¹⁹ President of Romania, "Role and Responsibilities," <https://www.presidency.ro/en/president/role-and-responsibilities>; Kayali and Coi, "Romania's Presidential Vote."

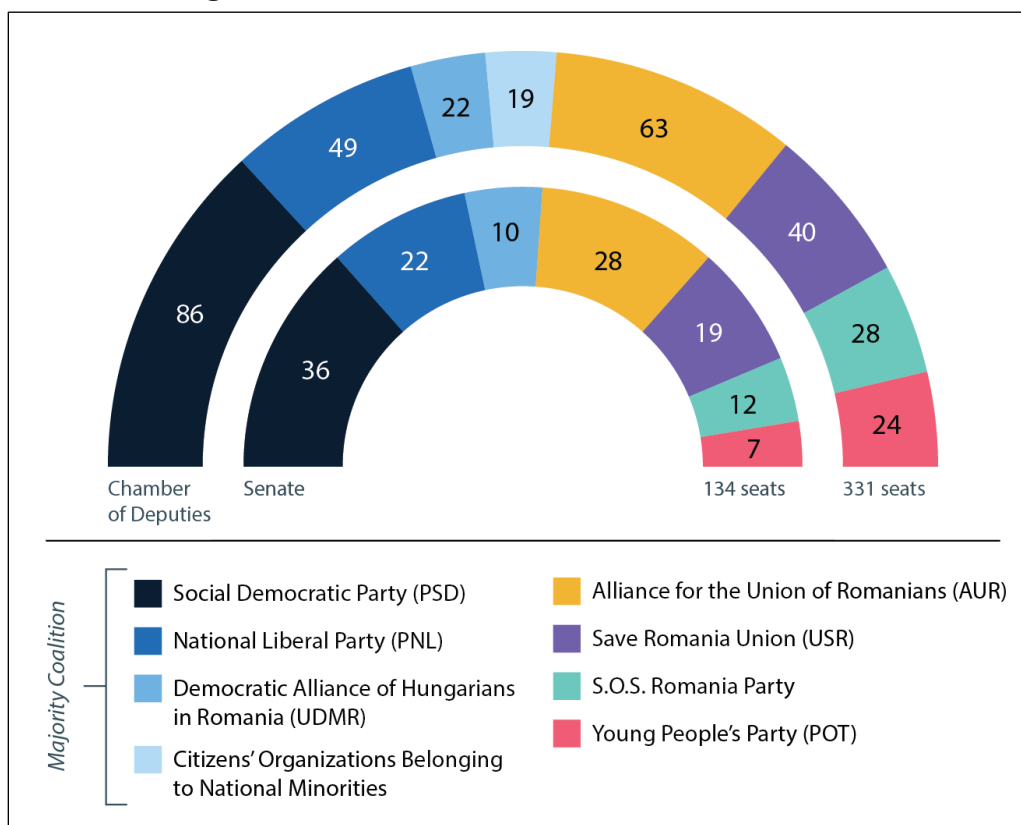
²⁰ Prosecutor's Office, "Punerea în mișcare a acțiunii penale față de un inculpat pentru săvârșirea infracțiunilor de instigare la acțiuni împotriva ordinii constituționale, comunicarea de informații false ș.a.," February 26, 2025, https://www.mpublic.ro/content/c_26-02-2025-16-02; and "47 de percheziții pe raza județelor Sibiu, Mureș, Timiș, Ilfov și Cluj," February 26, 2025, https://www.mpublic.ro/ro/content/c_26-02-2025-08-02.

²¹ Quoted in Bian and Marinescu, "Georgescu's Security Team." Also see Cristian Stefanescu, "Romania, DRC: Who is Mercenary Leader Horatiu Potra?" *DeutscheWelle*, February 13, 2025; Jean-Baptiste Chastand, "In Romania, the Troubling Role of French-Romanian Mercenaries in the Campaign of the Pro-Russian Presidential Candidate," *Le Monde*, December 17, 2024; RFE/RL, "Romanian Court Clears Ex-Mercenary Bodyguard of Far-Right Candidate," December 13, 2024; and Damian Matei, "Live Breaking: Călin Georgescu a ieșit de la audieri ..." *G4 Media*, February 26, 2025, <https://www.g4media.ro/breaking-calin-georgescu-ridicat-de-procurori.html>.

²² Bian and Marinescu, "Georgescu's Security Team"; Damian Matei, "Romanian Presidential Hopeful Călin Georgescu Detained by Prosecutors Amid Investigation into Russian Ties and Armed Mercenaries," *G4 Media*, February 26, 2025.

election).²³ In elections to both chambers, the far-right AUR placed second, followed by PNL, USR, smaller far-right parties, and UDMR. PSD, PNL, and UDMR agreed to form a coalition government, with Ciolacu reappointed prime minister.²⁴ The government's majority in both chambers is slim (see **Figure 2**). Parties in opposition include USR and a bloc of far-right parties.

Figure 2. Seats in 2024-2028 Romanian Parliament



Source: Graphic created by CRS, using data from <https://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.gp> (Chamber of Deputies) and <https://www.senat.ro/FisaSenatori.aspx> (Senate), accessed January 24, 2025.

Notes: Under Romania's constitution, organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities that do not win sufficient votes for representation in the legislature have the right to one seat each in the Chamber of Deputies. In the parliament that was inaugurated in December 2024, deputies from these organizations agreed to support the PSD-PNL-UDMR government in the Chamber.

Growth in Support for Far-Right Parties

Far-right political parties have gained traction in recent Romanian elections—a political dynamic also seen in some other EU member states.²⁵ To differing degrees, Romanian far-right parties and

²³ Katja Christina Plate, "Parliamentary Elections in Romania," Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, December 2024.

²⁴ Government of Romania, "Program de Guvernare: PSD-PNL-UDMR-Grupul parlamentar al minorităților naționale din Camera Deputaților 2024-2028," https://gov.ro/fisiere/pagini_fisiere/Program_de_Guvernare_PSD-PNL-UDMR-Grupul_minoritatilor_nationale_din_Camera_Deputatilor_2024-2028.pdf (hereinafter, Government of Romania, "Program de Guvernare").

²⁵ European Center for Populism Studies, "Professor Soare: Romania's Radical Right Populism Reflects Deep-Rooted Socio-Economic Frustrations," November 28, 2024 (hereinafter European Center for Populism Studies, "Romania's Radical Right Populism"); Liana Fix and Sophia Winograd, "How Far-Right Election Gains Are Changing Europe," (continued...)

politicians express skepticism of NATO and/or the EU; espouse populist narratives on the economy and political class; and criticize what they describe as global and European pressure against traditional Romanian values, national identity, and sovereignty.²⁶ Some politicians have been criticized for praising 20th century Romanian fascist figures, making irredentist or antisemitic statements, and using hate speech.²⁷ According to some analysts, the growth in support for far-right parties in Romania may stem from such factors as inequality, regional disparities, high inflation, frustration over corruption, dissatisfaction with the political establishment, Romania's media environment, and a perceived sense of second-class treatment within the EU.²⁸

AUR, the largest far-right party in parliament, was launched in 2019 and quickly gained support, garnering about 9% of votes in Romania's 2020 parliamentary election and around 22% in the 2024 parliamentary election. The party's platform lists as its four pillars Christian faith, liberty, traditional family, and the nation. The platform also calls for Romania and Moldova's union.²⁹ Some observers assess that AUR has sought to broaden its appeal by softening criticism of NATO and the EU, aligning with the European Conservatives and Reformists grouping in the European Parliament, and sidelining more controversial party figures.³⁰ Party leader George Simion, who reportedly is banned from entering Moldova and Ukraine, was considered to be a likely contender in the 2024 presidential runoff, but his campaign ultimately was eclipsed by Georgescu's. AUR has said it will back Georgescu in the May 2025 election.³¹ Other far-right parties in parliament include S.O.S. Romania and Young People's Party.³²

Council on Foreign Relations, October 15, 2024; and Gregoire Lory and Amandine Hess, "European Political Landscape Shifts Right in 2024 as Far-Right Gains Ground," *Euronews*, December 24, 2024.

²⁶ European Center for Populism Studies, "Romania's Radical Right Populism"; Kamil Calus, "A Shift Further to the Right: Radical Parties are Gaining Popularity in Romania," OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, April 29, 2024 (hereinafter Calus, "A Shift Further to the Right"); and Mihaela Mihai, "The Alliance for the Union of Romanians Represents a New Form of Far-Right Environmentalism," London School of Economics, November 21, 2024.

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Romania*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/romania/>; Calus, "A Shift Further to the Right"; Andrew Higgins, "How Romania's Fascist and Communist Pasts Haunt Its Politics," *New York Times*, December 12, 2024; Michael Bachner and Lazar Berman, "Israeli Envoy Meets Head of Romanian Party Accused of Antisemitism, Drawing Rebuke," *Times of Israel*, August 28, 2023; Ketrin Johecová, "Romanian MEP Slams 'JEWS AND AMERICANS' After Ban from Presidential Race," *Politico Europe*, October 7, 2024; and Alison Mutler, "The Far-Right Firebrand Too Dangerous to Run for Romania's Presidency," RFE/RL, November 21, 2024.

²⁸ Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2024—Romania*; Clara Volintiru, "Romania's Elections: All Quiet on the Eastern Front?" German Marshall Fund of the United States, June 13, 2024; Calus, "A Shift Further to the Right"; and European Center for Populism Studies, "Romania's Radical Right Populism."

²⁹ AUR, "The Alliance for the Union of Romanians Political Party," party program, <https://partidulaur.ro/english/>.

³⁰ *Euractiv*, "Romania's New Far-Right Backs Meloni Against EU's 'Soviet' Approach," August 1, 2023; Calus, "A Shift Further to the Right"; European Center for Populism Studies, "Romania's Radical Right Populism"; and Mihai, "Romanian Far-Right AUR Backs Pro-Russian Candidate Georgescu."

³¹ Iulian Ernst, "Romanian Radical Politician Banned in Moldova for Another Five Years," *Romanian Insider*, February 5, 2024; Catalina Mihai, "Romanian Government Publishes Reasons for Ukraine Banning Far-Right Leader," *Euractiv*, November 18, 2024; Mihai, "Romanian Far-Right AUR Backs Pro-Russian Candidate Georgescu"; and Calus, "A Shift Further to the Right."

³² In October 2024, the Constitutional Court banned S.O.S. leader (and Member of the European Parliament) Diana Șoșoacă from running for the presidency due to her "promotion of a constant anti-democratic and antisemitic discourse" and "systematic, persistent and long-lasting behavior aimed [at] undermining the constitutional foundations of the Romanian state and its guarantees." Quoted in Ketrin Johecová, "Unprecedented 'Putin-Style' Top Court Ruling Rocks Romanian Election," *Politico Europe*, October 15, 2024.

Corruption and Rule-of-Law Concerns

Corruption and weak rule of law have been viewed as persistent challenges in Romania.³³ Due to concern that these issues had not been resolved when Romania joined the EU in 2007, the European Commission (the EU's executive) continued to monitor the country's reform efforts under the so-called Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM). Into the mid-2010s, CVM assessments of Romania's anti-corruption and judicial reforms were generally positive.³⁴ The U.S. Department of State described the country's anti-corruption reforms during this period as "a model in southeastern Europe," despite continued challenges with corruption.³⁵

From 2017 to 2019, consecutive PSD-led governments (under prior party leadership) adopted changes to Romania's judicial and anti-corruption institutions, asserting that these institutions had become politicized. The EU, as well as officials under the first Trump Administration, raised concerns about the changes.³⁶ Some critics viewed the measures as an effort to protect senior PSD officials accused of corruption, including PSD's then-leader Liviu Dragnea, whom the U.S. Department of State designated for visa restrictions in 2019 for involvement in significant corruption under Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Appropriations Act, 2019 (Division F of P.L. 116-6).³⁷ Since 2019, Romania has taken some steps to reverse the measures. In 2023, the European Commission formally closed the CVM, citing Romania's progress fulfilling the commitments it made at the time of its EU accession.³⁸

Recent EU and Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption assessments have highlighted progress as well as continued challenges in Romania's justice system and fight against corruption.³⁹ The U.S. Department of State's 2023 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Romania described corruption and misuse of public funds as "widespread," and the U.S. Department of State's 2024 *Investment Climate Statement* for Romania noted that numerous corruption cases have been closed due to the statute of limitations on criminal liability.⁴⁰ The Department's *Integrated Country Strategy for Romania* (updated in March 2024) assesses that

³³ For expert and public opinion surveys, see Transparency International, *2023 Corruption Perceptions Index*, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>; and European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer on Corruption: Romania*, 2022.

³⁴ *Euractiv*, "Romania Praised Again in EU Justice Monitoring Report but Weaknesses Remain," January 26, 2017.

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *2023 Investment Climate Statements: Romania*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-investment-climate-statements/romania/>.

³⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Romania: Proposals Affecting the Independence of the Judiciary," November 27, 2017; U.S. Embassy in Romania, "Major Partners of Romania Express Concern About Rule of Law," April 3, 2019; and Carmen Paun, "Commission Renews Warning to Romania over Rule of Law," *Politico Europe*, April 15, 2019.

³⁷ Dragnea was designated along with members of his immediate family. See U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "Public Designation Due to Involvement in Significant Corruption, of Romania's Liviu Nicolae Dragnea," September 5, 2019, <https://ro.usembassy.gov/public-designation-due-to-involvement-in-significant-corruption-of-romaniias-liviu-nicolae-dragnea/>.

³⁸ European Commission, "Romania: Benchmarks Under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism Are Satisfactorily Met," November 22, 2022; and European Commission, "Rule of Law: Commission Formally Closes the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania," press release, September 14, 2023.

³⁹ European Commission, *2024 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the Rule of Law Situation in Romania*, July 24, 2024; and Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), *Fifth Evaluation Round Evaluation Report: Romania*, adopted by GRECO at its 94th Plenary Meeting, 5-9 June, 2023.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/>; and U.S. Department of State, *2024 Investment Climate Statement: Romania*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-investment-climate-statements/romania/>.

corruption is among the factors contributing to “disillusionment of Romanian voters, giving a boost to anti-system parties.”⁴¹

Economy

Economic conditions in Romania have improved considerably since the end of communist rule in 1989 and Romania’s subsequent EU integration. When adjusted for purchasing power, Romania’s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is on par with that of Poland.⁴² For part of the 2000s and 2010s, Romania was among the EU’s fastest-growing economies, leveraging its low-cost, skilled workforce; natural resources; and Black Sea ports. The U.S. Commerce Department’s *Country Commercial Guide* for Romania describes the country as a leading electronics and vehicle producer in central and eastern Europe and “a major center for mobile technology, information security, and related hardware research.”⁴³ Romania aims to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in the near term and adopt the euro as its currency (replacing the Romanian leu) when it meets the criteria for doing so.⁴⁴

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic adversely impacted Romania’s economy, with GDP contracting by nearly 4% in 2020.⁴⁵ Russia’s war on Ukraine contributed to increased energy costs and high inflation. Romania’s GDP grew by about 4.6% in 2022 and by 2.2% in 2023. Growth slowed to an estimated 1.9% in 2024 and is forecast to be 3.3% in 2025.

Poverty and other economic and socioeconomic challenges remain concerns in Romania. Within the EU, Romania had the highest rate of poverty or social exclusion as of 2023, with just under one-third of the population at risk. It also had the highest rate of severe material and social deprivation, although the share dropped from nearly 25% in 2022 to about 20% in 2023.⁴⁶ Other economic barriers include an aging, declining population; labor shortages and workforce skills gaps; an unpredictable legal and regulatory environment; and corruption.⁴⁷ Romania also is grappling with a high budget deficit; in 2024, the general government deficit was close to 8% (up from 6.5% in 2023), according to the European Commission’s fall 2024 *European Economic Forecast*.⁴⁸ The report attributes the increase in part to “very fast growth in government spending, mostly due to large increases in public sector wages, expenditure in goods and services, and social transfers, including pensions.” In December 2024, the Romanian government announced new measures aimed at lowering the deficit to 7% in 2025.⁴⁹

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *Integrated Country Strategy: Romania*, updated March 18, 2024.

⁴² Eurostat, “GDP per capita in PPS,” code `prc_ppp_ind`, accessed January 7, 2025.

⁴³ U.S. Commerce Department, International Trade Administration, *Romania—Country Commercial Guide*, January 12, 2024.

⁴⁴ Government of Romania, “Program de Guvernare”; European Central Bank, *2024 Convergence Report of the European Central Bank*, June 26, 2024.

⁴⁵ International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook Database,” October 2024.

⁴⁶ Eurostat, “People at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion in the EU, 2023,” and “Severe Material and Social Deprivation Rate, 2023,” <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>. The first indicator reflects “the sum of persons who are either at risk of poverty, or severely materially and socially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity,” and the second reflects the share “experiencing an enforced lack of at least 7 out of 13 items ... that are deemed to be desirable or even necessary to lead an adequate life.”

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *2024 Investment Climate Statements: Romania*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-investment-climate-statements/romania/>; U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, *Romania—Country Commercial Guide: Market Challenges*, January 12, 2024.

⁴⁸ European Commission, *European Economic Forecast Autumn 2024*, Institutional Paper 296, November 2024.

⁴⁹ Alexandru Cristea, “Romanian Govt Moves to Cut Budget Deficit to 7% in 2025,” *SeeNews*, December 31, 2024.

In 2025, Romania's economy may be adversely impacted by economic headwinds in the wider EU economy. Trade and commerce may be boosted, however, by Romania's (and neighboring Bulgaria's) full entry into the EU's Schengen area of free movement as of January 1, 2025.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Romania has access to €28.5 billion (about \$29.7 billion) in grants and loans under the EU's COVID-19 recovery and resilience package (contingent on adoption of certain reforms) and to €31.5 billion (\$32.8 billion) in cohesion funds under the 2021-2027 EU budget, among other EU funds.⁵¹ The U.S. Department of State's 2024 *Investment Climate Statement* for Romania notes, however, that "a demonstrated lack of administrative capacity to apply for EU funds, as well as absorb and implement EU-funded projects may dampen the [COVID recovery funds'] impact."

Romania's location and infrastructure could position the country to play a role in Ukrainian reconstruction. Some EU funds support rail and road transport projects to enhance connectivity in Romania and with Romania's neighbors (including Moldova and Ukraine).⁵²

Energy

An oil and natural gas producer, Romania is less reliant on foreign energy imports than most EU member states. Romania is phasing out coal as a source of power generation and increasing the use of natural gas, nuclear power (see below, "U.S.-Romania Relations"), and renewables.⁵³

Offshore natural gas and oil deposits and wind resources in the Black Sea could bolster Romania's energy security. Although delayed for several years by legal and regulatory issues, natural gas resource development also could increase Romania's prominence in European energy trade as the EU's largest natural gas producer. Romania's Neptun Deep—an offshore natural gas project slated to begin production in 2027—holds an estimated 100 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas, one of the largest in the EU. Romania's total offshore gas reserves are an estimated 200 BCM (Romania typically consumes 10-12 BCM per year).⁵⁴ Some environmental organizations have criticized Black Sea fossil fuel projects as contrary to EU climate targets.⁵⁵ A World Bank Group study assesses that Romania could feasibly install up to 7 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind capacity beginning in the 2030s (as a point of reference, Europe had a total of 32.3 GW operational offshore wind capacity in 2023). With U.S. technical assistance, Romania adopted

⁵⁰ With Romania and Bulgaria's full entry into Schengen, nearly all EU member states now belong to the Schengen area in which internal border controls have been eliminated.

⁵¹ European Commission, "Romania's Recovery and Resilience Plan," https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/country-pages/romania-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en; European Commission, "EU Cohesion Policy: €31.5 Billion for Romania's Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion, Competitiveness and Green and Digital Transition in 2021-2027," July 25, 2022; and Reuters, "European Commission Warns Romania That Reform Delays Put Recovery Funds at Risk," March 20, 2024.

⁵² U.S. Embassy in Romania, "Ambassador Kathleen Kavalec at the Ukraine Reconstruction Conference," September 25, 2024; Madalin Necsutu, "Romania Eyes Buying Moldovan Danube Port to Aid Ukraine's Reconstruction," *Balkan Insight*, August 28, 2024; and Jean-Baptiste Chastand, "Romania's Race to Develop Its Transportation Network with Ukraine," *Le Monde*, March 25, 2024.

⁵³ *Romanian Business Journal*, "Romania Targets 2,500 MW of New Capacity in the Energy System, with Investments in Gas-Fired and Renewable Power Plants," January 6, 2025.

⁵⁴ Madalin Necsutu, "Plan to Develop Romanian Black Sea Gas Fields Unveiled," *Balkan Insight*, June 21, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024 *Investment Climate Statements: Romania*; Georgi Gotev, "Romania on Its Way to Become EU's Largest Gas Producer," *Euractiv*, January 10, 2025.

⁵⁵ Greenpeace International, "Greenpeace Black Sea Protest: Proposed Gas Project Could Cause Tens of Thousands Premature Deaths," January 15, 2025.

legislation on offshore wind in 2024. As of 2023, Romania had 3.1 GW of onshore wind energy capacity and 1.9 GW solar capacity.⁵⁶

Romania and other countries in the region are pursuing energy connectivity projects, some with backing from the EU and/or the U.S.-supported Three Seas Initiative, which aims to boost connectivity in the region between the Adriatic, Black, and Baltic Seas. The Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary-Austria (BRUA) pipeline project, for instance, is intended to expand regional transmission capacity for non-Russian gas from the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea.⁵⁷ As another example, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary, and Romania signed an agreement in 2022 on a green energy partnership, the proposed centerpiece of which would be an electricity transmission cable across the Black Sea.⁵⁸ Romania's electricity and gas infrastructure and supplies have helped neighboring Moldova and Ukraine cope with increased energy insecurity since 2022 (see below, "Response to Russia's War Against Ukraine").

Foreign and Security Policy

Romania's strategic partnership with the United States and its EU and NATO memberships are the pillars of its national security policy.⁵⁹ The country's Euro-Atlantic orientation is grounded in strong support among Romania's centrist political parties and the population more generally, although support for euroskeptic parties has increased in recent years. Romanian views of Russia tend to be wary.⁶⁰

Romanian foreign policy objectives include elevating Black Sea security as a transatlantic priority, enhancing Romania's profile in the EU and NATO, supporting Ukraine, maintaining a close partnership with the United States, supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova (with which Romania has historical and cultural ties), and enhancing engagement in other global regions and in international organizations.⁶¹ Maintaining a strong allied presence along NATO's eastern flank, including in Romania, also is a policy concern.

⁵⁶ World Bank Group, *Offshore Wind Roadmap for Romania*, September 2024; U.S. Embassy in Romania, "Ambassador Kathleen Kavalec at PowerShift Summit," October 29, 2024; International Renewable Energy Agency, *Renewable Capacity Statistics 2024*, <https://www.irena.org/Publications/2024/Mar/Renewable-capacity-statistics-2024>.

⁵⁷ Three Seas Initiative, "Project: BRUA," [projects.3seas.eu/projects/brua-development-on-the-territory-of-romania-of-the-national-gas-transmission-system-along-the-corridor-bulgaria-romania-hungary-austria-\(brua-phase-1-and-2\)-and-enhancement-of-the-bidirectional-gas-transmission-corridor-bulgaria-romania-hungary-austria-\(brua-phase-3\)-and-the-development-on-the-territory-of-romania-of-the-southern-gas-transmission-corridor-for-taking-over-gas-from-the-black-sea-shore-\(black-sea-podisor\)](https://projects.3seas.eu/projects/brua-development-on-the-territory-of-romania-of-the-national-gas-transmission-system-along-the-corridor-bulgaria-romania-hungary-austria-(brua-phase-1-and-2)-and-enhancement-of-the-bidirectional-gas-transmission-corridor-bulgaria-romania-hungary-austria-(brua-phase-3)-and-the-development-on-the-territory-of-romania-of-the-southern-gas-transmission-corridor-for-taking-over-gas-from-the-black-sea-shore-(black-sea-podisor)).

⁵⁸ Reuters, "Four Leaders Sign Agreement to Bring Green Azeri Energy to Europe," December 18, 2022; *Euronews*, "Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary, and Romania Launch Black Sea Power Line to Bring Green Energy to EU," September 4, 2024.

⁵⁹ Presidential Administration of Romania, *National Defence Strategy 2020-2024*, 2020.

⁶⁰ Public opinion research generally indicates strong support among Romanians for NATO and EU membership. In a 2023 survey conducted by NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, 87% of respondents in Romania viewed the transatlantic relationship as important to dealing with security challenges and 83% supported continued NATO membership (NATO, Public Diplomacy Division, "NATO Annual Tracking Research 2023," March 14, 2024). A poll conducted by INSCOP Research in December 2024 found that 87.5% of respondents viewed the West (the EU, the United States, and NATO) as the "direction ... Romania should take in terms of political and military alliances" and 4.1% thought the country should look to the East (Russia and China) for such alliances. INSCOP Research, "INSCOP Research Survey, Commissioned by Funky Citizens," <https://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/28.01.2025-Survey-Report-INSOP-Funky-Citizens-EN.pdf>.

⁶¹ See Government of Romania, "Program de Guvernare"; and President of Romania, "Foreign Policy," <https://www.presidency.ro/en/commitments/foreign-policy>.

Black Sea Security and Russia

A key focus of Romania's security policy is the Black Sea region (BSR). Romania has been a leading advocate of a stronger NATO presence in the BSR and a more cohesive EU approach to the region. It plays an integral role in NATO's BSR deterrence and defense posture by hosting allied troops, equipment, and aircraft at several bases. Russia's actions in the BSR pose particular concerns for Romania, including Russian support for breakaway territories in Moldova and Georgia, war on Ukraine, and alleged hybrid threats targeting the BSR.

Romanian intelligence reports declassified in December 2024 (see above, "Annulment of the 2024 Presidential Election") assess that Romania increasingly is a target for Russian hybrid threats, including sabotage, cyberattacks, and efforts to shape the information space and boost anti-system parties and narratives. Some nongovernmental analyses share this conclusion. A 2024 study assesses that Romania, as a NATO frontline state bordering Ukraine and hosting allied personnel, is now "a prime target for Russian political warfare campaigns," with Russia aiming to "create a climate of uncertainty and anxiety" in Romanian society, "fracture the cohesion of Romanian society," "erode trust in the NATO alliance and EU institutions," and weaken popular support for Ukraine.⁶² A joint analysis by investigative platforms Intelligence Online and Snoop assessed that a "pro-Russian network gravitating around the Russia-tied marketing agency AdNow" was active in the context of Romania's 2024 presidential election as part of its longer-term presence allegedly seeking to manipulate Romania's information environment.⁶³ Other concerns include Russian violations of Romanian airspace, Russian drone debris on Romanian territory, Russian strikes against infrastructure on the Ukrainian side of the Ukraine-Romania Danube River border, and global positioning system jamming.⁶⁴

Defense Spending and Military Modernization

Romania has increased its defense spending since 2014, driven in part by concerns about Black Sea security. Estimated defense spending in 2024 was 2.25% of GDP (compared to 1.35% of GDP in 2014).⁶⁵ Romania's defense spending focuses on replacing Cold War-era equipment and systems and includes such U.S. equipment and weapons as Patriot air defense systems, High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), Piranha V 8x8 armored fighting vehicles, Naval Strike Missile Coastal Defense Systems, Joint Light Tactical Vehicles, Javelin anti-tank missiles, AIM-9X Sidewinder Block II air-to-air missiles, Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM), Sentinel radar systems, Abrams main battle tanks, and upgraded F-16 aircraft.⁶⁶ In September 2024, the U.S. Department of State made a determination approving a possible

⁶² Daniel Ionița et. al., "Norway and Romania: Navigating Information Warfare," New Strategy Center and Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, April 2024.

⁶³ Intelligence Online and Snoop, "AdNow Exposed: How Romania Became a Test Lab for Russian Interference in the West," December 3, 2024, <https://www.intelligenceonline.com/government-intelligence/2024/12/03/adnow-exposed-how-romania-became-a-test-lab-for-russian-interference-in-the-west,110347109-ev1>. Also see Marton Dunai, "From Vaccines to Votes: Russian Ad Agency Influences Europeans," *Financial Times*, December 24, 2024.

⁶⁴ Sofia Security Forum, New Strategy Centre, and Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, "NATO's Role in Addressing Security Threats and Challenges in the Black Sea: Time for a Comprehensive Strategic Approach for the Region?," November 2023; and Georgi A. Angelov, "Suspected Russian GPS Jamming Risks Fresh Dangers in Black Sea Region," RFE/RL, October 26, 2023.

⁶⁵ NATO, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024)," June 2024, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf.

⁶⁶ Ministry of National Defence, "Minister of National Defence Pays a Visit to the 74th PATRIOT Regiment," February 8, 2023; *Le Monde*, "Romania to Send Patriot Missile System to Ukraine," June 20, 2024; Kristen Pittman, "U.S. Army Supports Romania's First PATRIOT Live-Fire Exercise," U.S. Army, December 18, 2023; Defense Security Cooperation Agency notifications are available at <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales>.

\$7.2 billion sale of 32 F-35 fighter jets to Romania; Romania signed a letter and offer of acceptance in November 2024.⁶⁷

Romania is seeking to modernize its domestic defense industry and upgrade its military installations. In 2024, for example, Romanian state-owned defense company ROMARM and German firm Rheinmetall reached an agreement to build a gunpowder factory; the EU has committed partial financing for the project under an initiative to boost ammunition production in the EU.⁶⁸ Romania also is investing in upgrades to various military installations used by U.S. and NATO forces. The most high-profile such investment is a roughly \$3 billion expansion of Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base that would make it among the largest in Europe (U.S. security assistance also has supported the expansion, see below, “Security Cooperation”). The base has hosted U.S. forces and equipment for decades and serves as a key Black Sea hub for NATO.⁶⁹

Response to Russia’s War Against Ukraine

In the context of Russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine, Romania has been a strong supporter of Ukraine and has served as a hub for international support for Ukraine. Romania has backed successive EU sanctions packages against Russia, hosts F-16 training for Ukrainian pilots, and supports NATO’s enhanced deterrence and defense posture along the alliance’s eastern flank. Romania has aided Ukrainians fleeing the conflict and hosted an estimated 177,715 refugees as of December 1, 2024.⁷⁰ According to the Kiel Institute, a nongovernmental organization that tracks international aid to Ukraine, Romania has provided around €1.12 billion (about \$1.17 billion) in aid to Ukraine; that aid amount is equivalent to about 0.4% of Romania’s GDP and includes a Patriot air defense system.⁷¹ In July 2024, Ukraine and Romania signed a 10-year security cooperation agreement.⁷²

Romania also has helped facilitate Ukrainian grain exports and bolster Moldova’s and Ukraine’s energy security. Following Russia’s withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2023, Ukraine and Romania signed an agreement to expand Ukrainian exports via Romania’s Black Sea port of Constanța. According to the U.S. Embassy in Romania, Romania “stands out in Europe for the critical role it has played in supporting the export of Ukrainian grain to world markets.”⁷³ Amid increased energy insecurity in Ukraine and Moldova since 2022, Romania has helped stabilize electricity and natural gas supply to the two countries and has provided emergency

⁶⁷ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Romania—F-35 Aircraft, Transmittal No. 24-94, September 13, 2024; Lockheed Martin, “Romania Becomes the 20th Member of the F-35 Global Alliance,” November 21, 2024.

⁶⁸ Juster Domingo, “Rheinmetall to Build Gunpowder Factory in Romania,” *Defense Post*, March 21, 2024; Defence Industry Europe, “Rheinmetall and ROMARM to Build Powder Factory in Romania,” March 17, 2024; European Commission, “ASAP Results: Boosting Ammunition Production,” https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b694b109-fa2c-493e-bf1e-87768ae6469e_en?filename=ASAP%20factsheet.pdf; Rheinmetall, “EU Funding for Rheinmetall to Expand Ammunition Production,” March 26, 2024.

⁶⁹ *Romania Insider*, “Romania Plans to Spend EUR 2.5 bln to Rebuild Military Base at NATO Standards,” September 24, 2019; U.S. Department of State, “The United States and Romania: Strategic Partners for 25 Years,” November 28, 2022; Elisabeth Gosselin-Malo, “Romania Launches Expansion of Air Base Near Ukraine,” *Defense News*, June 13, 2024.

⁷⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation.”

⁷¹ Kiel Institute, “Ukraine Aid Tracker,” December 2024 update; Tony Wesolowsky, “From Neighbors to Power Partners: Romania’s Deepening Ties with Ukraine,” RFE/RL, October 22, 2024. Aid figures may not reflect all aid transactions.

⁷² See President of Ukraine, “Agreement on Security Cooperation Between Ukraine and Romania,” July 11, 2024.

⁷³ U.S. Embassy in Romania, “U.S.-Romanian Cooperation to Counter Russia’s Threat to Global Food Security,” September 18, 2023.

energy assistance. As Russia halted gas delivery to Moldova at the start of 2025, Romania pledged to help Moldova cope with the impact on electricity supply.⁷⁴

U.S. and NATO Forces in Romania

Following Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, the United States began to maintain rotations of troops in Romania under Operation Atlantic Resolve. After Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the United States deployed additional troops to Romania. Most U.S. troops are hosted at Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base (reportedly 1,800 as of June 2024, although the total varies at any given time in accordance with exercises and other unit movements). Romania also has hosted U.S. troops at Câmpia Turzii Air Base, Cincu Center, and other facilities, and it hosts the U.S. Aegis Ashore BMD system in Deveselu.⁷⁵

U.S., European, and NATO officials have welcomed Romania's long-standing commitment to the alliance's deterrence and defense posture along the eastern flank. Romania has invested in upgrading its facilities that host U.S. and NATO troops and support air policing.⁷⁶ Romania also hosts one of the four new multinational battlegroups that NATO deployed in 2022; France leads the battlegroup in Romania, with additional contributions from Belgium and Luxemburg as of February 2025.⁷⁷ The battlegroup, which is based in Cincu, is to be raised to brigade level in 2025.⁷⁸ Romania hosts a NATO air policing mission and Multinational Divisional Headquarters Southeast, among other alliance initiatives in the BSR.

Regional Cooperation and Contributions to Security Missions

Romania is active in various regional initiatives, including the U.S.-supported Three Seas Initiative; in Black Sea regional organizations; and in strategic coordination platforms, such as the Bucharest Nine, Moldova-Romania-Ukraine trilateral, and Poland-Romania-Turkey trilateral. In 2024, Romania signed an agreement with Bulgaria and Turkey to establish the Mine Countermeasures Black Sea task force, aimed at "facilitating the safety of navigation by countering the threats posed by sea means."⁷⁹ In July 2024, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece signed a Letter of Intent on a Military Mobility Corridor across the three countries' borders, with the aim of responding "more effectively to the current and future security challenges."⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Pavel Polityuk, "Ukraine Plans Record Power Imports After Russian Attacks on Energy Systems," Reuters, May 15, 2024; Kateryna Hodunova, "Moldova to Import Electricity from Romania, Ukraine as Russia Halts Gas Supply," *Kyiv Independent*, January 1, 2025; Aura Sabadus, "Wartime Ukraine's European Energy Integration Continues," Atlantic Council, December 19, 2023; Catalina Mihai, "Romania Ready to Support Moldova amid Energy Crisis," *Euractiv*, December 16, 2024.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, "Defense Secretary Calls Up More Troops to Europe," March 7, 2022; U.S. Department of Defense, "Posture Updates in Support of Allies in Europe," February 22, 2022; U.S. Department of State, "The United States and Romania: Strategic Partners for 25 Years," November 28, 2022; Nick Thorpe, "Romanian Village Set to Become NATO's Biggest Airbase in Europe," BBC, June 22, 2024.

⁷⁶ NATO, "Secretary General Praises Romania's Role in NATO," November 28, 2022; NATO, "NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance," December 21, 2022 (hereinafter NATO, "NATO's Military Presence"); Romanian Ministry of National Defence, "Romanian-American Joint Committee Meeting," December 15, 2022.

⁷⁷ NATO, "NATO's Military Presence."

⁷⁸ Radu Dumitrescu, "Belgium to Increase Troops in NATO Battle Group," *Romania Insider*, December 12, 2024.

⁷⁹ Ministry of National Defence, "Minister Tilvăr Will Sign, at Istanbul, the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of a Task Force to Counter the Sea Mines in the Black Sea—MCM Black Sea," January 10, 2024.

⁸⁰ Ministry of National Defence, "Letter of Intent Signed Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece for the Creation of a Military Mobility Corridor," July 11, 2024.

Romania has provided “significant contributions of troops, equipment, and other assistance” to NATO and coalition missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Kosovo, and elsewhere and contributes to global UN peacekeeping missions and EU missions.⁸¹ A Romanian Brigadier General commands the EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic, and in January 2025 Romania assumed command of the EU security mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR Althea) for a one-year period.⁸²

U.S.-Romania Relations

The United States and Romania developed close ties after the end of communist rule in Romania in 1989, including through a strategic partnership launched in 1997. Recent U.S. presidential Administrations have described Romania as a steadfast ally and maintained close cooperation with the country, particularly on security.⁸³ According to the U.S. Department of State, “Romania’s promotion of greater cooperation among its Black Sea neighbors in the domain of defense, among other areas, complements the U.S. goal of enhancing stability in this sensitive and important region.”⁸⁴ In January 2025, Romania was designated into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP), a long-standing Romanian objective in its relationship with the United States (Romanians are expected to be able to apply for travel under the VWP by the end of March 2025).⁸⁵ The U.S.-Romania relationship has generally had broad support in Congress, and Romania has welcomed congressional interest in the BSR.⁸⁶ An ongoing security concern for Romanian officials is maintaining a robust NATO and U.S. presence in Romania and other eastern flank countries.

Economic Relations

In 2023, U.S. exports of goods and services to Romania were \$2.3 billion and U.S. imports from Romania were \$4.9 billion. The same year, U.S. foreign direct investment in Romania was about \$2.1 billion. An estimated 75,400 persons in Romania were employed by majority-owned foreign affiliates of U.S. multinational enterprises.⁸⁷ Key areas of U.S. investment include information technology and telecommunications, vehicle manufacturing, energy, and services. According to the U.S. Commercial Service, additional best-prospects sectors for U.S. firms are agribusiness, defense, and health. Market challenges (see above, “Economy”) may impact U.S. economic activity in Romania.⁸⁸

⁸¹ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Security Cooperation with Romania,” January 20, 2025.

⁸² Romanian Ministry of National Defence, “Romania Has Taken Over Command of EUFOR,” January 21, 2025.

⁸³ See, for example, U.S. Department of State, “Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century Between the United States of America and Romania,” September 13, 2011; U.S. Department of Defense, “U.S.-Romania Chart 10-Year Road Map for Military Cooperation,” October 8, 2020; U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations With Romania,” June 21, 2024.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Security Cooperation with Romania,” January 20, 2025.

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken Announce Designation of Romania into the Visa Waiver Program,” January 10, 2025; U.S. Embassy in Romania, “Common Questions and Answers on Visa Waiver Program,” January 10, 2025.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Ministry of Foreign Affairs Welcomes Introduction of Legislation in the U.S. Senate to Establish a U.S. Black Sea Strategy,” July 13, 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “U.S. Senate Passes Black Sea Security Act,” July 28, 2023.

⁸⁷ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, “Romania—International Trade and Investment Country Facts,” <https://apps.bea.gov/international/factsheet/factsheet.html#356>.

⁸⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, *Romania—Country Commercial Guide: Market Opportunities*, January 12, 2024.

Security Cooperation

A 2005 bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement enables U.S. use of several bases in Romania, some of which served as logistical hubs for missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2020, under the first Trump Administration, the United States and Romania signed a 10-year Roadmap for Defense Cooperation to reinforce and expand ties. As noted above, the United States deploys rotational troops to Romania under Operation Atlantic Resolve. In addition, approximately 100-200 U.S. sailors and contractors are on persistent rotation at the U.S. Naval Support Facility Deveselu, the site of a U.S. Aegis Ashore BMD system. Operational since 2016, the Aegis Ashore system is one of two such U.S. contributions to NATO BMD under the U.S. European Phased Adaptive Approach (the other is in Poland).⁸⁹

U.S. security cooperation priorities in Romania have included cybersecurity, Black Sea maritime domain awareness, countering Russian influence, border security, nonproliferation, military modernization, and improved interoperability with NATO. From FY2020 to FY2024, the United States provided about \$316 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and about \$5.2 million in International Military Education & Training assistance to Romania.⁹⁰ About \$220 million in financing under the U.S. Department of Defense's European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) has supported construction projects at Romanian military installations, including Câmpia Turzii Base, Mihail Kogălniceanu Base, and Cincu Training Center, supplementing Romanian investment in the facilities.⁹¹ The FY2025 NDAA (P.L. 118-159) extended authority to carry out a \$21.7 million project at Mihail Kogălniceanu Base authorized in the FY2019 NDAA (P.L. 115-232). In September 2024, the United States and Romania signed a \$920 million FMF direct loan agreement; the Department of State also announced a \$60 million FMF grant toward the loan's servicing costs. The U.S. Embassy in Romania said the loan was to be used, in part, to support a "joint U.S.-Romanian, public-private initiative to produce artillery ammunition."⁹²

Energy

Energy is a growing area of U.S.-Romania cooperation, particularly civil nuclear energy. Romania's nuclear power plant in Cernavodă generates about one-fifth of the country's electricity; Romania aims to increase overall capacity by adding two new reactors and refurbishing an existing reactor. A U.S.-Romania intergovernmental cooperation agreement signed in 2020, under the first Trump Administration, outlines a "multi-decade relationship on

⁸⁹ U.S. Embassy in Romania, "United States Missile Defense Site at Deveselu Air Base in Romania," <https://ro.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/implementing-missile-defense-europe/united-states-ballistic-missile-defense-site-at-deveselu-air-base-in-romania/>; U.S. Navy, Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic, <https://www.surflant.usff.navy.mil/Organization/Supporting-Commands/US-Aegis-Ashore-Missile-Defense-Systems/US-Aegis-Ashore-Missile-Defense-System-Romania/About-Us/>.

⁹⁰ The figures were calculated using obligations data from foreignassistance.gov, a U.S. Agency for International Development- and Department of State-managed database that collects foreign assistance data from across the U.S. government. The data on the website are reported by U.S. government agencies and reflect the fiscal year in which the funds were obligated; the data do not include the year in which the funds were appropriated. [Foreignassistance.gov](https://foreignassistance.gov) is regularly updated, most recently on December 19, 2024. These figures may be subject to change and may not reflect complete data for recent fiscal years.

⁹¹ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Romanian and U.S. Officials in Campia Turzii Celebrate New Facilities at Air Base 71, Part of More Than \$100 Million in U.S. Investments in the Romanian Base," September 19, 2023.

⁹² Quoted in U.S. Embassy in Romania, "Ambassador Kathleen Kavalec at the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) Loan Signing Ceremony," September 25, 2024. See also Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Signing of FMF Direct Loan," September 25, 2024; U.S. Department of State, "\$920 Million U.S.-Romania Foreign Military Financing Direct Loan Strengthens NATO," September 25, 2024.

civil nuclear advancement.”⁹³ The same year, the two governments signed an agreement on modernizing and expanding Cernavodă (in doing so, Romania canceled plans to cooperate with China General Nuclear Power Corporation). In 2023, the U.S. Export-Import (Ex-Im) Bank approved a \$57 million loan to support preconstruction engineering and feasibility studies for the project.⁹⁴ In November 2024, Romania’s Nuclearelectrica signed a contract with a consortium of U.S., Canadian, and Italian firms to proceed on the two new reactors.⁹⁵

Small modular reactor (SMR) technology is an area of bilateral cooperation, as well. In 2021, Romania’s state nuclear energy company reached an agreement with U.S. firm NuScale Power on the possible deployment of SMRs in Romania, a “first-of-its-kind U.S. technology” aimed at “bringing emerging nuclear technologies to bear on the climate crisis.”⁹⁶ Under the Biden Administration, multiple U.S. government agencies supported potential SMR deployment in Romania. The U.S. Trade and Development Agency provided around \$15 million in grants to help identify potential SMR plant sites and fund a front-end engineering and design (FEED) study.⁹⁷ At the Group of Seven (G7) leaders’ summit in Japan in May 2023, then-President Biden announced up to \$275 million in early stage SMR support from the United States, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United Arab Emirates for the procurement of materials, advancement of FEED work, and finalization of site studies. At that time, the U.S. Ex-Im Bank and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) also issued letters of interest outlining up to \$3 billion (Ex-Im) and \$1 billion (DFC) in potential support for the SMR project.⁹⁸ In July 2024, U.S. and Romanian officials announced the launch of the second phase of the FEED study to “position the project to move to a final investment decision and construction.”⁹⁹ In October 2024, Ex-Im Bank’s Board of Directors approved a \$98 million loan for pre-project services.¹⁰⁰

Issues for Congress

U.S.-Romania relations were of interest to the 117th and 118th Congresses. Some Members engaged through delegations visiting the country and participation in the House Romania Caucus and interparliamentary platforms. In 2023, a group of U.S. Senators urged then-President Biden to hold a bilateral meeting with the President of Romania, stating that Russia’s war on Ukraine made it “imperative that the United States take all possible actions to maintain our longstanding partnership with Romania, a valued NATO Ally.”¹⁰¹ Following the first (November 24, 2024)

⁹³ U.S. Embassy in Romania, *U.S.-Romania Cooperation on Small Modular Reactors: Fact Sheet*, November 2, 2021.

⁹⁴ Export-Import Bank of the United States, “Export-Import Bank of the United States Board of Directors Unanimously Approves Financing for Three Transactions in Energy and Transportation Sectors,” September 22, 2023.

⁹⁵ U.S. Department of Energy, “U.S. Department of Energy Showcases Clean Energy Achievements at COP29,” November 25, 2024; Government of Canada, “\$3 Billion in Federal Export Finance to Support Canadian Businesses While Providing Clean Energy Security for Romania,” September 19, 2023; and Nuclearelectrica, press release, November 15, 2024.

⁹⁶ U.S. Embassy in Romania, “U.S.-Romania Cooperation on Small Modular Reactors: Fact Sheet,” November 2, 2021 (hereinafter U.S. Embassy in Romania, “U.S.-Romania Cooperation”).

⁹⁷ U.S. Embassy in Romania, “U.S.-Romania Cooperation”; U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), “USTDA, Romania Expand Nuclear Energy Partnership,” October 27, 2022.

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, “The United States and Multinational Public-Private Partners Look to Provide Up to \$275 Million to Advance the Romania Small Modular Reactor Project; United States Issues Letters of Interest for Up to \$4 Billion,” May 20, 2023.

⁹⁹ U.S. Embassy in Romania, “U.S. and Romania Announce Milestone in Small Modular Reactor Project, Advancing Romania One Step Closer to Clean Technology Leadership in the Region,” July 24, 2024; *Euractiv*, “Romania Expects €5.5bn Price Tag and 2025 Final Investment Decision for Small Modular Reactor,” March 22, 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Export-Import Bank of the United States, “Export-Import Bank of the United States Board of Directors Supports More than \$1 Billion in Transactions,” October 1, 2024.

¹⁰¹ The text of the letter is available at https://www.shaheen.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/potus_romania_letter.pdf.

round of Romania's subsequently annulled presidential election, some Members of Congress expressed concern about allegations of Russian interference.¹⁰²

Under the 117th Congress, legislation was introduced concerning the U.S.-Romania Strategic Partnership (H.Res. 1222). Under the 118th Congress, legislation was introduced on Romania's entry into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (S. 814).

Congressional interest in Romania during the 117th and 118th Congresses also corresponded to growing concern about Black Sea security and congressional oversight of U.S. policy toward the BSR. In both chambers, some Members introduced bills with Black Sea policy requirements (H.R. 6367/S. 3407 in the 117th; H.R. 1680/S. 804 in the 118th). Congress enacted language in the FY2022 NDAA (P.L. 117-81) urging cooperation with Black Sea allies and partners. It also enacted language in the FY2023 NDAA (P.L. 117-263) calling on the United States and NATO to consider adopting intergovernmental and interagency Black Sea strategies, describing the region as "critical to United States interests and to the security of NATO in the region." Congress enacted Black Sea strategy requirements in P.L. 118-31 and P.L. 117-328 (see below). Some Members raised questions about Romania and Black Sea policy in oversight hearings in 2021 and 2023. In 2022, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe cochaired a multilateral roundtable in Romania on Black Sea security, comprising Members and senior-level Black Sea regional government officials.¹⁰³

Romania and U.S.-Romania relations may be of interest to some Members of the 119th Congress. Some areas of potential legislation and oversight activity include security assistance and cooperation with Romania, bilateral energy cooperation, U.S.-Romanian cooperation on shared priorities in the BSR and the Western Balkans, the implications of ongoing political developments in Romania for U.S. priorities in the bilateral relationship, and the second Trump Administration's foreign policy toward Romania and the BSR more broadly. Members also may assess implementation of Black Sea strategy requirements under the FY2024 NDAA (P.L. 118-31) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328 and accompanying explanatory statement):

- P.L. 118-31 directed the President to direct the National Security Council to develop an interagency strategy regarding the BSR and Black Sea states, outlining goals and objectives relating to security assistance, energy security and diversification, countering Russian and Chinese economic coercion in the region and deepening U.S. and allied partners' economic ties to the region, expanding U.S. high-level engagement with the region, and increasing U.S. coordination on the Black Sea region with the EU and NATO.
- In the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 117-328, Congress directed the Secretary of State (along with heads of relevant federal agencies) to submit to appropriate congressional committees a strategy for working with NATO allies to deepen economic ties with, and strengthen economic and security assistance for, Black Sea states, including to support efforts to bolster democratic resilience.

¹⁰² Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Chairman Wilson and Ranking Member Cohen Condemn Russian Malign Interference in Romanian Election," December 5, 2024; Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Shaheen, Ricketts, Cardin, Risch, Statement on Putin's Assault on Romania's Presidential Election," December 16, 2024; Representative Mike Turner, statement posted on Facebook, December 20, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/RepMikeTurner/photos/my-statement-with-nato-parliamentary-assembly-president-congressman-gerry-connol/1183665853116434/>; Senator Chris Coons (@ChrisCoons), X post, January 2, 2025, <https://x.com/ChrisCoons/status/1874931728231682052>.

¹⁰³ Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Black Sea Security Summit," <https://www.csce.gov/hearings/black-sea-security-summit/>.

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