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ROMANIA'S RESPONSE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE: DIPLOMACY, HUMANITARIAN ACTION, AND REGIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

This study examines Romania's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, analyzing its diplomatic, security, and humanitarian actions. Employing a qualitative methodology based on document analysis, the research draws on official statements from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NATO, the EU, and the UN, alongside academic literature and policy reports. The analytical framework focuses on Romania's strategic position, its engagement within international organizations, and the evolution of policies addressing both the war and refugee flows.

Findings show that Romania pursued a multi-dimensional strategy. Militarily, it reinforced NATO's eastern flank and increased defense spending. Diplomatically, it actively participated in EU and OSCE initiatives, supported sanctions against Russia, facilitated humanitarian operations, and advocated for Ukraine's international recognition, including ratifying the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Humanitarian measures included establishing the Suceava Humanitarian Hub, adopting a National Plan for refugee integration, and providing extensive assistance to over three million Ukrainians entering Romania.

The study concludes that Romania's response reflects the interplay between national interests, alliance commitments, and regional security imperatives. Its proactive diplomacy, military contributions, and humanitarian support have strengthened NATO's eastern flank and aided Ukraine, while long-term challenges remain in refugee integration, economic pressures, and sustaining its elevated regional role.

Keywords: Ukraine; war; diplomacy; Romania; International Organizations.

1. Introduction

The war in Ukraine, sparked in February 2022 by Russia's unjustified aggression, stands as one of the most significant and dramatic conflicts in post-war Europe. This conflict has had a profound impact on global geopolitics, reshaping the world economy and diplomatic relations.

Russia's attack on Ukraine reminded the international community of the fragility of peace and regional stability. In an era of globalization, the repercussions of this conflict have extended far beyond Ukraine's borders, generating humanitarian, economic, and political crises in numerous states. Waves of refugees, economic sanctions imposed on Russia, and disruptions to global supply chains represent just a few examples of the consequences of this war.

For Romania, the news of Ukraine's invasion was met with deep concern as well as solidarity with the Ukrainian people (Porumbescu, 2023). As a neighboring country and a member of NATO and the EU, Romanian officials reacted swiftly, condemning the ongoing military operation and expressing their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, Romanian society responded with demonstrations of solidarity and support for Ukrainian refugees by organizing humanitarian initiatives and providing direct assistance to those affected by the conflict.

This research focuses on a detailed analysis of Romania's diplomatic actions during the crisis, examining its position within international organizations relevant to the management of the conflict, the measures taken in the context of the neighboring war—including the support offered to refugees—and the evolution of diplomatic relations with Ukraine. Drawing on a diverse range of primary and secondary sources, the study aims to provide an objective perspective on how Romania perceived and reacted to the outbreak of the war.

2. Method

This article employs a qualitative methodology grounded in document analysis. The primary sources include official statements and press releases from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations, along with publicly available international reports. Secondary sources consist of academic publications, research reports, and expert analyses that contextualize Romania's strategic behavior and evaluate the broader implications of the war for regional stability.

The analytical approach involves examining Romania's geopolitical position and strategic interests, conducting a content analysis of official documents and diplomatic actions from February 2022 onward, comparing Romania's role across various international organizations engaged in crisis management, and tracing the evolution of its policies in response to the escalation of the conflict. This framework enables a systematic reconstruction of Romania's diplomatic engagement and illuminates the ways in which national interests intersect with alliance commitments.

3. Findings

Romania played an active role within several international organizations responsible for managing the conflict, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Romania's strategic importance increased markedly after the invasion, as it shares the longest NATO-Ukraine border among Alliance members—a geopolitical reality already evident prior to February 2022 but significantly amplified by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Mazurkiewicz & Michnik, n.d., p. 17).

On 24 February 2022, Romania was among the seven NATO states that requested consultations under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, invoking the mechanism designed for situations in which a member state perceives a threat to its territorial integrity or security (NATO, n.d.-a). NATO subsequently established eight multinational battlegroups, one of which was deployed in Romania. Within weeks, approximately 4,000 U.S. soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division were stationed on Romanian territory, significantly strengthening deterrence on NATO's eastern flank (The New York Times, 2023). At the societal level, Romania saw large public demonstrations against Russian aggression, with protests held both in Bucharest and in smaller cities (European Digital Media Observatory, 2023).

The scale of the Russian invasion elevated the Black Sea region to a critical area for European security. Romania's position as a NATO pillar in this region led to the strengthening of its defensive posture and contribution to deterrence. Romania announced an increase in military spending from 2% to 2.5% of GDP in 2023 (Euractiv, 2024), while NATO and U.S. forces expanded their presence in the country (NATO, n.d.-b). These efforts underscore Romania's growing role on the eastern flank and its strategic relevance in countering Russian military pressure (Mazurkiewicz & Michnik, n.d., p. 19).

From the earliest days of the invasion, Romanian authorities responded rapidly and in close coordination with their Ukrainian counterparts. Romania supplied ambulances, fuel, medicine, food, and other essential goods, and on 9 March 2022 established the Suceava International Humanitarian Hub near the Ukrainian border. This facility became a central logistical platform for directing international aid into Ukraine. Romania also initiated a European platform for dialogue on refugee integration during the Bucharest Forum held on 8–9 September 2022, an event in which Austria, Malta, and the OECD offered to host subsequent meetings (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a).

Romania's diplomatic strategy centered on two objectives: on the one hand, sanctioning and isolating the Russian Federation, and, at the same time, providing political support to Ukraine at all levels.

Romania played a key role in approving and implementing the EU's sanctions packages. The country also contributed actively to multilateral diplomatic efforts within the UN Security Council and General Assembly to condemn Russia's actions. Romania supported humanitarian programs, including contributions to the World Food Programme (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a). Moreover, it backed all relevant UN resolutions seeking to hold Russia internationally accountable (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a).

A major political milestone was Romania's strong support for granting EU candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. Romania was also the first EU member state to ratify the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a).

On 3 March 2022, Romania joined 44 participating states in activating the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, enabling the deployment of an expert mission to document human rights violations, potential war crimes, and breaches of international law committed during the invasion (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b). Romania's involvement reflected its consistent commitment to supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Romania engaged in a wide range of international efforts to support Ukraine's defense and stability. Furthermore, efforts were made to counter the spread of false information and alarming news (Stanescu, 2022). In addition to providing humanitarian aid, Romania participated in NATO and EU initiatives, contributed to monitoring missions, and supported sanctions against Russia. Bilaterally, Romania maintained active consultations with Ukrainian and NATO partners, including through the B9 Format, a regional consultation framework of NATO states on the eastern flank. Romania also facilitated military equipment deliveries to Ukraine, including through the maritime route from Constanța to Mariupol (Petrović, n.d.).

Romania implemented comprehensive measures to support refugees fleeing the war. These included mobile camps, distribution of food and hygiene products, access to the labor market, and free healthcare and education. On 26 July 2022, the government adopted the National Plan for the Integration of Ukrainian Refugees, designed as a long-term framework for the development of integration policies (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). The Suceava Humanitarian Hub coordinated 74 international aid convoys and delivered 40 electricity generators to support Ukraine's energy infrastructure, severely affected by Russian airstrikes (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Since February 2022, more than three million Ukrainian citizens have crossed into Romania, and 147,695 asylum applications have been registered. Language barriers, limited access to employment, and economic pressures pose significant challenges to integration. The government's financial constraints have also led to tensions and occasional protests among Ukrainian refugees (Albulescu, 2024).

Following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Romania became a critical transit point for Ukrainian grain exports to global markets. The Port of Constanța played an essential role in ensuring the continued flow of grain. However, local producers expressed concerns about market disruptions, placing additional pressure on Romanian authorities (Albulescu, 2024).

4. Discussion

Romania's response to the war in Ukraine illustrates the interplay between national interests, alliance commitments, and regional security imperatives. As a frontline NATO state, Romania has taken on a more assertive regional role, contributing to deterrence efforts, coordinating humanitarian actions, and supporting diplomatic initiatives aimed at holding Russia accountable.

Romania's diplomatic messaging during the Ukraine war can be interpreted through the lens of communication theory: as Vlăduțescu (2013) argues, communication is not just a neutral transmission of information but often involves manipulative valences and persuasive strategies, especially in social or political contexts. In this context, Romania's actions demonstrate a multi-dimensional strategy that combines several interconnected approaches. The country has implemented security-oriented measures, reflecting concerns about regional stability and the strategic importance of the Black Sea. At the same time, Romania has engaged in humanitarian efforts, motivated by solidarity and the unprecedented influx of refugees (Cosciug, Coșciug, Porumbescu, Kyrychenko, 2023). Its diplomatic activism underscores alignment with Western partners and a commitment to international norms, while economic and logistical contributions further support Ukraine's resilience and global food security.

However, new challenges have emerged. Refugee integration requires long-term policies, societal adaptation, and sustained financial commitment. Economic pressures—particularly in agriculture—create domestic tensions. Moreover, Romania's expanded geopolitical role also brings increased responsibility within NATO and the EU.

Recent research in Romania indicates that public attitudes towards immigrants—and by extension, refugees—are shaped by a dynamic interplay of cultural values, perceived threats and social contact. Pogan (2021) finds that a majority of Romanian respondents consider immigrants a potential enrichment for the national culture rather than a burden, and she situates integration as a "dynamic, contextual process" influenced by micro, meso and macro-level factors (p. 275). This insight further supports the argument that refugee integration in the current crisis cannot rely solely on policy measures but must also engage public attitudes, cultural openness and structural readiness.

Conclusions

Romania has demonstrated a consistent and proactive approach in responding to the war in Ukraine. Its involvement—military, diplomatic, and humanitarian—has strengthened NATO's eastern flank and supported Ukraine during a time of profound crisis. Romania's actions within international organizations, its bilateral initiatives, and its role as a humanitarian hub underscore its strategic importance in the region.

The long-term implications of the war will continue to shape Romania's foreign and security policy. Challenges related to refugee integration, economic adjustments, and regional security will require sustained political attention. Nevertheless, Romania's commitment to international law, European values, and transatlantic cooperation positions it as a key actor in shaping the future stability and reconstruction of the region.

A key dimension of Romania's response to the war concerns the management and long-term integration of Ukrainian refugees. As Pogan (2020) argues, immigrant integration is a multi-layered process shaped simultaneously by individual characteristics—such as linguistic skills, socio-demographic factors, or psychological adaptation—and country-level conditions, including institutional capacity, public attitudes, and the broader cultural climate. Her framework highlights that successful integration requires both structural preparedness (policies, institutions, coordination mechanisms) and cultural openness within the host society.

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