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POLITIC

1. **President Iohannis welcomes Moldovan Deputy Premier Natalia Gherman at Cotroceni Palace**

President Klaus Iohannis welcomed at the Cotroceni Presidential Palace Moldovan Deputy Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Natalia Gherman, with the Moldovan Minister reasserting on the occasion the determination of the Chisinau Government to carry on along the country's pro-European track.

According to a Presidential Administration release, President Iohannis assured the Government of the Republic of Moldova of Romania's cooperation and solidarity, hailing also the start, this 05.03, of Romanian gas deliveries to Moldova via the Iasi-Ungheni pipeline, as a concrete and substantial sign of the support provided to the Republic of Moldova.

Natalia Gherman thanked President Klaus Iohannis for Romania's strong support for the pro-European course of the Republic of Moldova. "Our track to Brussels runs through Bucharest," said the visiting Minister, adding that Romania is currently Moldova's main trading partner, reads the cited release. The Republic of Moldova counts on an approach based on differentiation between the member states of the Eastern Partnership in the dialogue between its main actors, Moldovan Foreign Minister Natalia Gherman declared on Wednesday in Bucharest.

Gherman, in joint press conference with ForMin Bogdan Aurescu

In a joint press conference with the Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu, Gherman said: 'We are closely monitoring the process that has been launched (...) between the member states of the European Union and the European institutions as regards the reviewing of the European neighbourhood policy. We are really counting on the approach based on differentiation between the member states of the Eastern Partnership eventually prevailing in the talks between the main partners. Each member state of the Eastern Partnership would be evaluated based on its own progress and merits in the

implementation of pro-European reforms. Also, we really hope that the assistance and commitment of the European Union will be proportional to this reform effort; not least, the financial aid offered by the European Union to its eastern neighbours.'

She mentioned that the Republic of Moldova is looking forward to the result of the evaluation of the neighbourhood policy concerning the attitude of the EU towards Russia.

'In the current conditions, a very clear, well-articulated attitude of the European Union is necessary as regards Russia and the other eastern neighbours. This is why I mainly talked about an approach based on differentiation case by case,' the Moldovan top diplomat explained.

According to Gherman, it is very important for her country to have a perspective of its adhesion to the European Union.

'As we are the most advanced country in terms of implementation of the objectives of the Eastern Partnership, I assume we have every right to count on the support and solidarity of most of the EU member states and of the European institutions in the outlining of the perspectives of the relations between Moldova and the European community, so that we are really visionary about the projection of the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union,' the minister asserted.

Commenting the approach based on differentiation mentioned by Gherman, Aureescu said it was 'absolutely natural.'

'There is no doubt about the fact that the Republic of Moldova is still the most performing state within the Eastern Partnership. (...) We are working on a new approach to the neighbourhood policy, and within it, on a modernization of the Eastern Partnership, so that we keep what was good and efficient so far, so that the principles of differentiation (...) and the other principles already used in the relations - including the financial ones - with the states of the Eastern Partnership are preserved, while finding new efficiency criteria for the neighbourhood policy and for the Eastern Partnership,' the Romanian minister said on the same occasion.

The Moldovan minister of Foreign Affairs, deputy premier Natalia Gherman said she is absolutely certain that the projects for the Republic of Moldova's getting European and modern will be voted by all the political parties as soon as they will be tabled in the Chisinau Parliament.

She reminded on Wednesday in Bucharest in a joint press conference with Romania's chief diplomat, Bogdan Aureescu that the Communists' Party has voted for a governing programme which stipulates "very clear" the objective of launching the integration negotiations of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union.

"As soon as this support is obtained, we count of course on achieving these targets and other goals no less ambitious reflected in the programme and we are absolutely certain that, once we get to the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova with draft laws aiming to modernise the country, to put it on a European track and ensure a better living standard for the country's citizens, not only the Communists' Party, but all the other parties represented in the Parliament will vote to supporting these projects," Natalia Gherman said.

2. President Iohannis: Romania needs to strengthen strategic credibility

Attending the meeting for the review of the 2014 activity report of the Ministry of National Defence, President Klaus Iohannis said that Romania needs to strengthen its "strategic credibility."

"We are now in a complex strategic context characterized by significant changes at regional and global level. In Romania's proximity, conventional and hybrid type military actions pose a direct and violent challenge to the legal fundamentals of the security of the European space. In this context, NATO membership, alongside the strategic partnership with the United States and our status of EU member represent the foundation for our foreign policy and security. Strengthening Romania's profile inside NATO and EU is a priority and an essential component of the country's security, a line of conduct that is specific to good governance. And at the same time it answers the expectations of our fellow citizens. 11 years since our acquiring NATO membership and 8 years since our effectively joining the EU, our country needs to strengthen its strategic credibility. In an area characterized by colliding strategic interests, in a time of rapid geopolitical changes, credibility represents an important national value both in relation with our allies and partners, as well as with our own fellow citizens," Iohannis said at the headquarters of the Defence Ministry.

According to the head of the state, Romania's credibility as a nation depends on the continuity in promoting a European and transatlantic-oriented policy, predictability in taking foreign policy decisions, in defining national interests and the strategic goals that arise from there, on transparency in designing public policies and planning the resources for their implementation.

President Iohannis also mentioned the conclusion of the agreement to finance the Army with 2 percent of the GDP as of 2017 and keep this minimum level for 10 years, until 2027.

"But it is your responsibility that this financial effort of the entire nation materializes through an appropriate prioritization of equipment programs that meet the new strategic and budgetary realities," Iohannis said.

He specified that the Army is an institution of the state with the mission of protecting the vital interests of the nation.

"Romania has proven its capacity as an international provider of security, including by the participation with military forces in international stabilization and assistance missions. From now on, this status must be reinforced both through a broader range of instruments, through diplomatic efforts, as well as through measures aimed at increasing the operational capacity of the army," concluded President Klaus Iohannis.

3. President Iohannis on an official visit to Poland

The relation with Poland is a priority to Romania, both on a European level and a trans-Atlantic level, being highlighted by the existence of a strategic partnership, and the two countries are connected by a common history of cooperation and solidarity in crucial moments, President Klaus Iohannis said before leaving on the official visit he will pay to Warsaw.

Presidents Iohannis, Komorowski adopt joint declaration to boost Romania - Poland Strategic Partnership

President Klaus Iohannis announced having adopted, together with his Polish counterpart Bronislaw Komorowski, a joint declaration to boost Romania's Strategic Partnership with Poland.

"We discussed the security situation in the eastern neighborhood and the role and responsibilities Romania and Poland have in the region. On this basis, together with President Komorowski, we agreed that our Strategic Partnership requires reassessment and reconsolidation. We just adopted a joint declaration to this effect, as a continuation and enhancement of the one regarding the Strategic Partnership between Romania and Poland, signed in Bucharest in 2009. This new declaration points out that the relations between our countries are now at an all-time high, but also that we want to take them even further, especially as regards the strategic component," said Iohannis.

He thanked the Polish President for the talks, openness and the extremely good conclusions.

"I am very happy to be here in Poland, in response to the invitation Mr. President Komorowski extended to me. He addressed this invitation on the first day after my election as President of Romania, and it produced me great joy. We have since prepared this visit, and here we are, having effectively met. This visit I pay at the beginning of my term emphasizes, and I want it to emphasize, the importance myself, all of us, attach to the relationship between Romania and Poland. This relationship is based on the Strategic Partnership of substance we have in place and which we want to deepen," said Iohannis.

He termed talks with his Polish counterpart as cordial and weighty.

"I reaffirmed the top importance the bilateral relation with Poland has for Romania," said President Iohannis.

He stressed that the declaration adopted together with President Komorowski is aimed "not just at strengthening Romania — Poland bilateral relations at security level, but also at the correlated development of the strategic partnerships we have with the U.S. and at maintaining political solidarity within NATO."

The head of state mentioned that during the talks, the parties approached subjects of common interest to this region of Europe currently faced with "major challenges", adding that an important part of the discussions with Polish President Komorowski was devoted to developments in the Eastern neighborhood.

"I reiterated Romania's firm support for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We condemned in the strongest terms the serious deterioration of the security situation in south-eastern Ukraine, expressing at the same time hope for a progressive implementation of the package of measures agreed upon in Minsk, on February 12. I reaffirmed Romania's full readiness to contribute, together with Poland and other partners from the EU, to the advance of reform processes in Ukraine," Iohannis said.

The head of the state stressed that for Romania, supporting the European course of the Republic of Moldova remains a top priority.

"We are determined to provide as substantial as possible support in this respect. We both agreed that a strong message of support should be conveyed for the pro-European course of all the Eastern Partnership member countries," concluded Iohannis.

Komorowski: I count on Romania's cooperation in strengthening the Eastern flank of NATO

The Polish President, Bronislaw Komorowski stated with respect to the strengthening of the Eastern

flank of NATO that he counted on Romania's cooperation as well.

"The next NATO Summit to be held in Warsaw in 2016 will demand more from us than just conducting a common assessment of how much we achieved from the decisions that were taken in Newport (...) In my opinion, we shouldn't regard the Summit in Warsaw as yet another occasion to draw the conclusions from what we managed to achieve since Newport, but we should also see it as an opportunity to strengthen even more the eastern flank and to try to make decisions to consolidate a sense of security in the region. I won't hide from you the fact that I count on Romania's cooperation in this respect and I also count on Romania to participate in the building of a common stand and common ideas in relation to the eastern flank of the Alliance," President Komorowski said during the joint conference he had with his Romanian counterpart, Klaus Iohannis.

He showed that he discussed with President Iohannis about the situation in the region, especially about the situation in Ukraine and Moldova.

"We spoke about the various development opportunities that we have in terms of our cooperation in making preparations for what might happen in Ukraine. What is important is to say that we share the same convictions that the West must be prepared for a negative development of the situation. And with this I mean the possibility of the Minsk Treaty not to be respected," explained the Polish President.

In this context, he also showed that the Polish authorities also intend to arrange a meeting with the Romanian and Ukrainian Presidents.

"Based on the very good experience that I had after my common visit with President Poroshenko in Moldova, which resulted in this country gaining more importance lately, we decided to try to arrange another meeting in Poland with three heads of state — that is with the Romanian, Ukrainian and Polish heads of state — where to discuss about the situation in the region, and I would also like it to look at this as a wish to strengthen the Romanian-Polish cooperation in matters that have to do with the security of our region," said Komorowski.

He appreciated the Romanian President's visit to Warsaw as "a chance" for strengthening cooperation between Poland and Romania.

"I believe that this is a huge chance for us to reshape the already existing Strategic Partnership between Romania and Poland. I am certain that this partnership is very necessary considering the development of the situation in our region, in this part of Europe, where some bad changes intervened in terms of security," said Komorowski.

He also said he was glad to sign with President Iohannis a joint declaration on enhancing cooperation between Romania and Poland in various fields of activity.

The political calendar, according to Komorowski, is urging both Romania and Poland to strengthen cooperation.

Presidents Iohannis, Komorowski agree on regional summit in Bucharest

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis announced an agreement with his Polish counterpart Bronislaw Komorowski on holding a regional meeting of the heads of state this autumn in Bucharest, to prepare the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016.

"We agreed with President Komorowski on organizing this autumn in Bucharest a new edition of the heads-of-state-level meeting in Bucharest, in the format used last July in Warsaw — a regional format

we appreciate is important, a format that enhances the regional collaboration and is a very useful instrument to prepare the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016," Iohannis said in his joint media statement with the President of Poland.

He mentioned that the date of the proposed meeting has to be agreed with the other heads of state. The meeting "will definitely contribute to improving the cohesion in the region and to the harmonization of our points of view in preparation of the NATO summit," President Iohannis asserted.

The President of Romania is on an official visit to Poland from Wednesday to Friday. He met his Polish counterpart Bronislaw Komorowski on Thursday at the presidential palace, in an official ceremony attended by the representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited in Poland and by several children.

4. Germany's Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier met Romania's President Klaus Iohannis at the Cotroceni Palace

Romania's President Klaus Iohannis welcomed visiting Germany's Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier to discuss the latest developments in the relations between Romania and Germany, topical items of the European agenda, as well as Romania's accession to the Schengen Area.

The Presidential Administration reports in a press release that the two officials reviewed the latest developments in, and future prospects for, the relations between Romania and Germany, with both of them pointing to a rising dynamic as of late in the bilateral visits at the highest level, which should be proof to the privileged nature of the relations between Romania and Germany. "Romania's President showed that Germany continues to be Romania's most important trade partner, speaking up in favour of new investors being drawn in, underscoring the success stories in Romania of large German companies," reads the release.

The Presidential Administration mentions that also discussed were topical items on the European agenda, especially the developments in the Eastern Neighbourhood. "Mr President Klaus Iohannis reaffirmed support for the European journey of Moldova. The German minister mentioned that Germany attaches the same importance to preserving the pro-European leanings of Moldova," reads the release. In their conversation, the two officials discussed the worrying developments in Ukraine, as well as the state of play in the Western Balkans. "As far as Romania's accession to the border-free Schengen Area was concerned, the German official underscored that a solution has to be identified that will allow progress with achieving the objective."

5. PM Ponta: I don't rule out new agreement with IMF

Prime Minister Victor Ponta on Tuesday evening said that he doesn't rule out a new agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), pointing out that the body which must endorse Romania's development is the European Commission. He said that, in order for Romania to continue its development, a reduction of the gaps from the Western European countries is needed.

"No, I don't rule it out [e.n. — a new agreement with the IMF], but I would like us to no longer be treated each time as the pupil in the front desk, who does everything the teacher tells him to and then he also gets scolded, because he is in the front desk. We have done our job, the programmes were very

good, because from a minus 8 per cent deficit and economic recession we have implemented some important structural and budget discipline reforms, but at the same time Romania's capacity to continue to develop supposes the reduction in the gaps from those in the West. To state this more clearly, if a country in the West of Europe invests 100 euros in motorways, we cannot invest the same amount, because they already have the motorways and we don't," the head of Government said at private broadcaster RTV.

Ponta pointed out that he wants Romania to join the Eurozone in 2019 and to ensure the presidency of the European Union (EU) from a performing state position.

"There are some things related to Romania's particularities, to our development potential, and the European Commission in particular, as this is not so much about the IMF; they must endorse our development, so we shouldn't be a country that always falls behind. We have made important steps these years and I want us not to slow down those steps, because in 2018 — 2019 I want us to join the Eurozone, I want us to ensure the presidency of the EU as a country following in the footsteps of Poland, namely as a country that came from communism, from the East, and that proved it is much more performing than some older EU members," he also said.

6. PM Ponta received, at the Government House, the visit of German Foreign Minister Frank- Walter Steinmeier

Prime Minister Victor Ponta received at the Government House, the visit of German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who is paying an official visit to Romania at the invitation of his Romanian counterpart.

"The Prime Minister hailed the excellent level of the investment and economic dynamic, Germany being Romania's main economic partner, and presented the performances of Romanian economy, the measures taken by the Government to encourage investments. Emphasized were the positive results of the cooperation with Germany in what regards the promotion of dual education and the intention to expand the projects in this domain", reads a release remitted, after the meeting, by the Press Bureau of the Government shows. According to the quoted source, both officials reiterated their appreciation "for the model that is represented by the collaboration in matters regarding the German minority in Romania, and, respectively, for the substantial contribution of the Romanian community in Germany to key domains for the economy and society of this country". The quoted release adds that the two officials agreed to continue coordination and consultations between the two governments, with the open commitment of the two states to deepen the European project and the converging positions in multiple cases being in view.

Prime Minister Victor Ponta presented Romania's objectives in regards to ensuring the energy security, including the emphasis placed on the interconnection with the Republic of Moldova. "The two officials approached the situation in the eastern vicinity. The Prime Minister reiterated support for the European path of the Republic of Moldova. Emphasized was the openness of the two states to support the Republic of Moldova on its path towards modernization and reform and implementation of the Association Agreement, in the interest of the citizens of this country", the aforementioned release concludes.

Steinmeier: the German investors appreciate Romania; there are still some deficiencies regarding transparency

The minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated that the investors in his country appreciate Romania, but there are still some problems as regards transparency and judicial security, underlying the fact that he encouraged the Romanian government to go on with the reforms for the solutioning of these deficiencies.

‘The German investors appreciate Romania (...)Where there are some problems, in the discussions with the premier I have discussed about the deficiencies as regards the judicial security and transparency and I took the occasion to encourage the government to go on with the reforms in order to solve the deficiencies’ said on Monday in Bucharest the German minister for foreign affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier in a joint press conference with Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister Bogdan Aurescu.

He mentioned that an important German company Deutsche Bahn decided to extend its business to Romania.

In his turn, the Romanian minister of foreign affairs Bogdan Aurescu said that Germany is still Romania’s first commercial partner, with tradings last year of almost 20 billion euro. ‘At the same time, Germany is still the third investor in Romania and from the discussions we had today it was obvious the significant potential for the strengthening of economic cooperation, including as regards investment’ Aurescu said.

The situation in Ukraine "has nothing to do" with the conditions for accession to the Schengen Zone, Steinmeier says

German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Frank Walter Steinmeier stated that the conflict in eastern Ukraine "has nothing to do" with the conditions for accession to the Schengen Zone, also adding that the effort made by Romania in this respect was "remarkable."

"The conflict related to the eastern part of Ukraine changed so many things in Europe of such a manner that our citizens maybe still can't realize how dangerous this conflict really is, in fact. (...) But, however, this has absolutely nothing to do with the conditions for the accession to the Schengen Zone, which those states that are still not members should continue to make efforts to fulfill.

I also know that Romania too made remarkable, accelerated, efforts over the past years to meet those conditions. I know that the most recent CVM report highlighted the progresses made, especially with respect to strengthening justice independence and that it is now the European Interior Ministers' time to make the next steps. We are ready to support this dialogue in an open manner," the head of the German diplomacy told a press conference he held in Bucharest together with his Romanian counterpart, Bogdan Aurescu. In this context, Aurescu said that Romania is "fully" prepared to ensure the security at the external border of the European Union and to contribute to the strengthening of security in the Schengen Zone. "Romania's accession to the Schengen Zone without any sense of a doubt will strengthen security in the Schengen Zone, since Romania is already acting as a de facto Schengen state.

We have achieved many things in terms of strengthening the European space against illegal migration and other types of threats. Accession to the Schengen will only increase the efficiency of this type of

activity and obviously that we can prove all these affirmations with concrete arguments," said the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

7. Conclusions on the European Union foreign ministers informal meeting (Gymnich) in Riga

The European Union foreign ministers discussed in an informal meeting (Gymnich) in Riga on Friday and Saturday the situation in Ukraine and the EU-Russia relations in this context. Other topics on the agenda were the preparation of the Eastern Partnership summit, to be also held in Riga on May 21-22, and the review of the European Neighbourhood policy.

The Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu participated in this meeting, where the top European diplomats extensively debated the latest evolutions in Ukraine, focusing on the implementation of the Minsk II agreement. The European Union relations with Russia were also analysed in this context. OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] Secretary General Lamberto Zannier contributed to the dialogue opening, a release of the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry (MAE) informed on Saturday.

Aurescu mentioned the importance of a quick and unconditioned application of the February 12 Minsk agreements, as they represent a roadmap, a path to a political solution of the conflict in Ukraine, MAE detailed.

The Romanian minister pointed out the halting - incomplete, indeed - of violence in eastern Ukraine. According to the MAE, Aurescu reasserted Romania's position in support of maintaining the regime of sanctions in the present context, as it is an efficient means to be preserved until the Minsk agreements are fully implemented, to result in an authentic political commitment to the efforts of improving the field situation and the agreements implementation process.

Aurescu pointed out that the EU must also be prepared to adopt new sanctions, if fighting resumes, around Mariupol, for instance, or if other points of the Minsk agreement are blocked. He stressed the vital importance of the EU support for the implementation of the steps subsequent to the ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons stipulated in the Minsk agreements; otherwise, he said, there is a risk of Transnistria-type evolution in eastern Ukraine, with no perspective to a complete political solution of the crisis. He also pleaded for a strategy of the EU relations with Russia that considers the situation in the Eastern Neighbourhood as a whole, MAE added in the aforementioned document.

As regards the Eastern Partnership Summit in May, the top Romanian diplomat asserted it should be a milestone for an ambitious perspective of the EU concerning the Eastern Partnership states. Aurescu highlighted the importance of a flexible approach on medium and long term, taking into account the European aspirations of the partner states and the principles of differentiation and evaluation based on individual merits, accompanied by a wise use of conditions, so that the partners are encouraged.

'The EU should not hesitate to get involved in the settlement of the protracted conflicts in the Eastern neighbourhood,' Aurescu declared. He underscored that the Eastern Partnership should focus more in the future on the solutions to the frozen conflicts, including by using the assistance means at EU's disposal.

Aurescu also insisted that the Republic of Moldova was the most advanced country in the Eastern Partnership; therefore, he maintained, the efforts of the Chisinau authorities should be encouraged and constantly supported. The MAE also informed that the minister voiced his hope, following the visits of the Romanian President to Chisinau and respectively of the Moldovan foreign minister to Bucharest, that the Moldovan Government will maintain its European commitment. He encouraged his colleagues to participate in the meeting of the Support Group of the European Action for Moldova, convened by the Romanian and French foreign ministers on March 16, in Brussels.

Aurescu also called the EU member states that did not yet ratify the Association and Free Trade Agreements to do it as soon as possible; Romania was the first state to complete this step in July 2014. He also asked for palpable progress at the Riga Summit on the liberalization of visas for Georgia and Ukraine.

The Summit should also acknowledge the European perspective of the states in the Eastern Partnership, including the Republic of Moldova, as this perspective has a strategic relevance for the EU, the Romanian minister also pointed out.

The reviewing of the European Neighbourhood Policy was approached from the perspective of the launching of consultations with the partner states, on March 4.

'This complex process belongs in a wider framework of re-evaluation by the European Union of the challenges facing both regions - South and East - and aims at creating the favourable context for the reasonable and efficient use of all the European instruments for the neighbourhood. During the talks held with the participation of EU-aspiring and candidate states, a strong accent was placed on the active and constructive role they have to play in order to contribute to the consolidation of the regional action and profile of the European Union.,' MAE's release further reads.

The Romanian foreign minister noted the need for a balanced regional approach between the eastern and southern sides of the European Neighbourhood Policy. He also proposed to add, within the process of considering the review of this policy, the development of a security dialogue platform, given the evolutions of the EU neighbourhood both on south and on east and the preoccupations of the partner states about these matters.

As regards the crisis in Libya, the EU foreign ministers asserted the importance of keeping an active role of the European Union in the facilitation of the dialogue moderated by the United Nations, to contribute to the forming of a national unity government.

8. The European Parliament encourages five member states, among which Romania to acknowledge Kosovo

EP adopted a draft resolution regarding the process of European integration of Kosovo, through which they encourage the five member states, including Romania which did not acknowledge the independence of the former Serbian province to do this in order to facilitate the normalisation of the relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

The European legislative encourages the new Kosovo government to continue its European route and

says they committed to follow' with determination, including through legislation, a series of priority aspects, such as measures to strengthen the rule of right, the establishment of a model for the judicial system, on the basis of the principles of independence, professionalism and efficiency, as well as the systemic and effective combating of corruption and organised crime at all levels'.

The European Parliament encourages, on the other hand, five member states, Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain ' to proceed to the acknowledgement of Kosovo' saying that this ' will facilitate the normalisation of the relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

According to the text of the draft resolution, all member states of the EU are invited to 'do whatever it takes to facilitate the economic contacts and interpersonal contacts, as well as the social and political relations between our citizens and those in Kosovo'.

In 2008, Kosovo proclaimed its independence to Serbia, but Belgrade refuses to acknowledge it. Five EU member states – Cyprus, Romania, Slovakia and Spain did not acknowledge the independence of Kosovo.

On February 27 2015, the premier of Albania, Edi Rama while on a visit to Bucharest requested Romania to acknowledge the province Kosovo as an independent state, showing that, according to their opinion, the solution to this problem will ensure the regional security and will calm down ' certain tendencies and frustrations of neighbouring countries'.

In November 2013, when in Bucharest the Albanian premier showed that he appreciated the attitude of Ponta as regards Kosovo, the former Serbian province which proclaimed its independence in 2008, and said that he expected that the acknowledgement of the Kosovo state by Romania take place, appreciating that this fact will contribute to the peace and development of the region.

9. Minister Tilvar, Canadian officials discuss removal of visa requirements

Removing visa requirements and the continuation of the political dialogue for Romanian citizens to receive, in the shortest time possible, equal treatment in terms of visas with the citizens of the other EU states were among the subjects on the agenda of the talks between Minister-delegate for Relations with Romanians Everywhere Angel Tilvar and Canadian officials, during the Romanian official's current visit to Canada.

According to a press release issued on Tuesday, Minister Angel Tilvar on Monday participated in the meeting of the Romanian delegation Canadian Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Chris Alexander, the meeting with the Speaker of Canadian Parliament's House of Commons Andrew Scheer, and in the signing of the Joint Declaration of the presidents of the two friendship groups, in the presence of the speakers of the Chamber of Deputies and the House of Commons.

The discussions referred to the objective of eliminating the visa obligation, and the sides agreed to continue the political dialogue for Romanian citizens to receive, in the shortest time possible, equal treatment in terms of visas with the citizens of the other EU states, and also to fully benefit from the provisions of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) recently signed by the European Union and Canada when this takes effect, with positive impact on the continuation of the

Romanian-Canadian relations, as well as on the Romanian community in Canada, the release reads.

The good integration of the Romanian community in Canada, and the need to preserve its identity elements from a linguistic, cultural and spiritual viewpoint were also highlighted. In this regard, Minister Delegate Angel Tilvar pointed out the importance of the necessary support from Canadian authorities for educational projects. The sides commended the involvement of the Romanian community members in the democratic life of their country of residence and the significant level of representation, including in the structures of the federal government of Canada.

The agenda of the first day of the visit also included a visit to the headquarters of the National Research Council (NRC). The Romanian delegation was welcomed by the executive vice-chairman of the Council, Bogdan Ciobanu. During the meeting the NRC activities were presented, the cooperation with Europe in EUREKA, the research relations with Romania, and also the Romanian researchers' contribution to the projects developed by this prestigious institution. In the afternoon, the Romanian official was present, alongside the Romanian community, in the "Saint Mary" Church in Gatineau — Quebec, where he held a meeting with priests, members of the Parish Council and of the Carpatina Association.

Minister-delegate for Relations with Romanians Everywhere Angel Tilvar is paying, March 9 to 13, a working visit to Ottawa and Toronto, Canada. The Romanian official is part of a delegation led by the Chamber of Deputies' Speaker Valeriu Zgonea.

10. The two NATO commands will operate in Bucharest

The two NATO commands to open in Romania in 2016 will operate in Bucharest and will have a key-role in ensuring connections between the national and the Alliance's forces, accomplishing the command and control in the area where it is necessary to deploy a rapid reaction force, the minister of National Defence Mircea Dusa said at the 2014 annual report of the institution.

The minister said that Romania expressed its intention to provide multinational headquarters at division level, as well as to host a multinational structure of forces' integration.

"Our propositions were materialized at the beginning of February 2015, on the occasion of the Defence ministers' meeting in Brussels, where it was decided that the Alliance will have through these two multinational headquarters a visible, persistent presence in Romania. I characterized this achievement as one very important after our NATO integration. We have decided that in a first stage we should attain the initial operational stage of the units for the NATO forces' integration by June this year, and by the summit in Poland in 2016 to finalise the complete operational capacity. As regards the division's multinational command, we expect the completion of the initial operational capacity by 2016, and the complete operational capacity by 2018," Dusa added.

11. Eduard Hellvig sworn in as head of intelligence, sets corruption as priority target

Eduard Hellvig, who got the Parliament's all clear, by a vote of 498 to 15, for director of the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), took the oath of office before the Parliament's plenary sitting. The voting procedure was with secret ballots.

Fighting corruption, developing national security capability, currently the key lines of action

The freshly installed director of the Romanian Intelligence Service considers that two lines of action should be the priorities of the next period — fighting corruption and developing national security capability.

"SRI underwent in recent years a comprehensive modernization and reorganization process, becoming a vector of national stability. The responsibility for ensuring Ukraine's cyber security reflects the status acquired within the Euro-Atlantic information community. In my view, the priority of the Intelligence Service in the next period should be strengthening performance both as part of domestic efforts towards the reinforcement of the rule of law, as well as in the current tense geostrategic context. Therefore, I consider that two lines of action are essential — fighting corruption and developing our national security capability," Hellvig said on Monday in Parliament, after being voted into office and sworn in. Hellvig explained that the plague of corruption represents a risk factor both for the national security and for the proper functioning of state institutions.

"Despite the major progress made in recent years, corruption further remains a risk factor for national security, affecting the economy and undermining the functioning of the institutions. History might no longer be patient with us and if we want Romania to remain standing, we'll need a strong state, built on a democratic partnership with its own citizens and on solid institutional pillars," said Hellvig.

In his speech, the new SRI head also referred to the need to strengthen the strategic relations with Euro-Atlantic partners in the context of the developments in the region.

"I want us to deepen operational cooperation and the exchange of information with Euro-Atlantic partners, especially the U.S., in the context of tensions escalating in our region and of the decisions regarding NATO's military-strategic re-pivoting to Eastern Europe. Recent developments showed us how important the parliamentary control on the activity of the SRI and the cooperation of the Intelligence Service with Parliament and the Constitutional Court of Romania is for the definition of a legislative framework that meets both the democratic and national security imperatives," he concluded.

New director assures no changes at Romanian Intelligence Service

Eduard Hellvig, sworn in by the Parliament as the new director of the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) on Monday, announced he does not intend to make changes in the Service; he mentioned deputy director General Florian Coldea among those he wants to keep.

'As I told the Committee [of the Parliament for the supervision of the SRI], my personal appreciation about the SRI is very good. Therefore, right now I have no reason for not collaborating with all my deputies in the SRI, including of course General Coldea. Definitely, there will be no changes in the SRI,' Hellvig told the plenum of the Parliament after taking the oath.

Asked how he intends to manage the image of the SRI, the director answered there are no such problems for the service.

'There was a very dense and demanding electoral period. What I appreciated was the SRI stayed independent throughout this period stretching over the past years, since former director George Maior

took the office. It is important, I think, to continue this institutional independence the SRI had from the political corps; therefore, I think that if small hiatuses existed, things can improve. Perhaps a greater openness in the communication area; perhaps a more present public diplomacy from the SRI in the public space might help making its activity more transparent; but overall I don't think there are fundamental problems,' Hellvig commented.

12. Calin Popescu-Tariceanu received the insignia of the National Order of the Legion of Honour of France in the rank of Knight

French Ambassador to Romania, Francois Saint-Paul will offer the insignia of the National Order of the Legion of Honour of France in the rank of Knight to Senate Speaker Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, during a ceremony that will take place at the Embassy of France in Bucharest, La Residence de France.

"Mr Calin Popescu-Tariceanu has favored the ties with France both as a political person, and as a businessman. In 1996, Mr Tariceanu occupied the position of Minister of Industry and Commerce, in the cabinet led by Victor Ciorbea, and during his mandate he met Mr Louis Schweitzer, at that time the Chairman of Renault, and established the bases of the most important French-Romanian business deal: the entry of the Dacia brand in the Renault portfolio", a press release remitted to AGERPRES by the French diplomatic representation.

According to the quoted source, in his mandate as Prime Minister (2004-2008), Calin Popescu-Tariceanu had an excellent collaboration with his French counterpart, Francois Fillon, one of the results of this collaboration being the naming of Dacian Ciolos as European Commissioner for Agriculture.

Furthermore, the quoted source shows that Tariceanu granted support for the project of the new French Highschool Anna de Noailles.

The Legion of Honor is the highest military and civilian distinction of France, instituted in 1802 and granted uninterruptedly from 1804 onward.

13. Brummell: Romania, Great Britain, compatible in development of major economic projects

Romania and Great Britain are compatible in the development of some joint economic projects in important areas such as oil and natural gas, nuclear energy, transport and environment, the British Ambassador in Bucharest, Paul Brummell said on Tuesday on the occasion of Prime Minister Victor Ponta's receiving a delegation of British businesspeople paying an official visit to Bucharest.

'I am proud to accompany here, in Romania, the largest British trade delegation since the Revolution. We know that Romania has very concrete and very ambitious plans in terms of infrastructure development. Here, for example, you have a Master Plan transport infrastructure approved, which is concrete and ambitious. That it is why, we have invited British companies operating in four important areas: oil and natural gas, nuclear energy, transport, water and environment, because we know that Romania has very big plans in these areas. Great Britain can help Romania in these areas. My most important message today is that Romania and Great Britain are compatible', said the British Ambassador at Victoria Palace.

In his turn, the head of the British business delegation, Brian Wilson, the Commercial Ambassador of

the British Governmental Agency for Trade and Investment, gave assurances that British investors would pursue, in the projects intended to be developed, helping Romania spend as effectively as possible the funds received from the European Union.

Romania, as many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, has at its disposal an extraordinary development resource, namely accessing and successfully using European funds. It is in both in the interest of Great Britain, as well as of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe that the British industry play a key role in this upgrading process, said Commercial Ambassador Brian Wilson.

The British official also pointed out the fact that 90% of Romania's young people speak English, which creates a great opportunity for the development of a natural partnership with Romania.

Also attending the event, held at Victoria Palace, alongside Prime Minister Victor Ponta, were Economy Minister Mihai Tudose and Energy Minister Andrei Gerea.

The UK's delegation to Bucharest, called "Great Mega Mission 2015," is made up of over 50 British companies, and is visiting Bucharest March 9 to 10, in order to stimulate commercial transactions with Romania.

"The visit is part of a wider effort aimed at doubling Great Britain's commercial transactions with Central and Eastern Europe to 30 billion pounds by 2020," according to a press release issued by the British Embassy on Monday.

The bilateral trade between Romania and Great Britain reached 3 billion euros in 2014, with British investments in Romania currently standing at 6.5 billion euros.

ECONOMICS

1. PM Victor Ponta: American, British or European investments in Romania, a guarantee for business partnerships of "win-win" type

Prime Minister Victor Ponta said, at Victoria Palace, that the presence in Romania of American, British or European investments represents a guarantee for the development of some business partnerships of "win-win" type, profitable and sustainable ones, and these should use Romania's "young and trained generation."

"I would like to emphasize the most important 'treasure' of Romania, its human resource. There is an impressive number of young people trained and ambitious, graduates of some universities in Romania, which are becoming increasingly competitive. It is a strategic objective for any prime minister or political leader, younger or older, to find a way for this golden generation to stay in Romania, not only to create for them the opportunity to have good jobs and a better life somewhere in America or in Great Britain, in Western Europe. And thanks to the American, British and European investments, the businesses developed here will be of win-win type, profitable and sustainable, and will be able to meet this strategic objective to use our great 'treasure,' represented by this young and trained generation," said Ponta, who has received a delegation of British businesspeople.

Victor Ponta mentioned in this context the importance of developing in Romania of some sectors such as IT, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, which, according to him, have become increasingly competitive, and recommended that British companies invest in these areas.

The prime minister has also referred to the tax legislation, having mentioned the 16% flat tax and the continuation of the tax relief process for companies in the coming period, through the planned reduction in VAT and in the costs related to workforce. He has told investors that Romania is a stable and predictable country and that it provides guarantees in this regard, in a "sensitive and sometimes unstable" region, with a big neighbour to the East, "a big bear", which creates problems to countries such as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Referring to the recent period, the Romanian prime minister pointed out that, after a difficult period of crisis, from 2009 to 2011, which hit most European countries and created large economic and social problems, since 2012, Romania has recorded a significant economic growth, with an average of some 3%.

The prime minister underscored the fact that, compared to 2012, when the situation regarding European funds was a "real shame," given the low intake rate of only 10%, at present the Romanian authorities have succeeded in successfully increasing this rate to 55%, which is still unsatisfactory, as there are funds still not spent.

2. PM Ponta: INS shows net investments increased 3pct in Q4 2014

Prime Minister Victor Ponta said that the data of the National Institute of Statistics (INS) confirm the increasing trend of investments in the Romanian economy, showing, in this respect, that, according to the INS, the net investments advanced 3 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2014, mostly due to the construction works.

"A good piece of news! According to the INS, in the fourth quarter of 2014 the net investments grew 3 per cent, especially due to the construction works," the Prime Minister wrote on his Twitter page.

Net investments in national economy dropped 3.1 per cent in 2014 against 2013, down to 65.598 billion lei (current prices), with an increase of 3 per cent recorded in the last quarter of the year, compared with the same period of 2013, the National Institute of Statistics (INS) informs in a release.

Last year, investments in new construction works totaled 30.666 billion lei, representing 46.8 of the total investments, compared with 47.1 per cent in 2013, while investments in tools and equipment, and also transport means stood at 26.782 billion lei, representing 40.8 per cent of the total investments, compared with 42.1 per cent in 2013.

Net investments in Romania's economy climbed 3 per cent in the fourth quarter of last year, compared with 2013, totaling 23.056 billion lei (current prices). The growth mainly relied on the growths recorded in the new construction works and equipment (including transport means) sectors, by 6.6 per cent and 0.3 per cent respectively. In terms of other expenditures, there was a decrease by 1.4 per cent.

Net investments in new construction works went up 1.2 percentage points (including transport means) in Q4 2014 against Q4 2013. The weight of net investments in tools and equipment (including transport means) dropped 1.2 per cent.

According to the INS, the data are the result of statistical research conducted on a quarterly basis based on short-term indicators in industry, constructions and services for economic operators and also of the

research conducted on the investments made in such operators in agriculture, banks, insurance and budgetary sectors (public administration, education, health and social security).

3. ForMin Aurescu met Chairman of the American-Romanian Business Council (AMRO) Eric Stewart

Romania's Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu on Thursday met Chairman of the American-Romanian Business Council (AMRO) Eric Stewart, to whom he underscored the commitment of the Romanian authorities to deepen and increase the dynamics of the economic dimension of the strategic partnership between Romania and the US, pleading in favour of increased US economic presence in Romania and the region.

In a press release issued on Thursday, Romania's Foreign Ministry (MAE) quotes Aurescu as having underscored the importance of a consolidated commitment on the part of the US to support the countries in the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood, especially Moldova, including by investments in energy security.

The two officials exchanged opinions on how to improve the investment climate in Romania, with emphasis on the implementation of an action plan for good economic governance.

"Bogdan Aurescu hailed the important activity and part played by AMRO in promoting Romania as a destination of interest to American companies, as well as in boosting bilateral investment and commercial exchanges that contribute to Romania's economic growth. Also appreciated were the AMRO steps to increase Romania's profile in the US political quarters. In the context of the Romanian-US political dialogue, Aurescu voiced appreciation for AMRO's initiatives and projects in 2015, both in the US and in Romania, discussing with the AMRO chairman the prospects for new investment by American companies in Romania," according to the MAE release.

The officials also discussed Romania's access to the Visa Waiver programme, with Aurescu asking AMRO to continue its demarches, especially with the US Congress, to achieve this objective.

"In the context of the 135th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Romania and the US, Aurescu hailed the interest of AMRO in getting involved in the organisation of public events devoted to this anniversary, jointly with other important institutional partners of MAE, with emphasis on a conference on the strategic partnership, to be hosted by Washington DC this spring, to be organised by MAE jointly with the CAESAR Foundation and the League of Romanian Students Abroad (LSRS)," reads the MAE release.

The AMRO chairman is quoted as thanking the Romanian chief diplomat for MAE's support to the AMRO initiatives, which included the conduct of dialogue with relevant Romanian institutions, while voicing the interest of the US companies represented by AMRO in continuing their long-term investments in Romania.

Stewart highlighted the success enjoyed by the projects already carried out and the potential Romania possesses in various areas, as well as the intention of some companies not yet AMRO members to invest in Romania.

He also showed that AMRO will continue its support for the inclusion of Romania into the Visa Waiver program.

The release specifies that the American-Romanian Business Council (AMRO) is a Washington, DC based non-profit organisation that promotes commercial relations between the United States and Romania. The mission of the Council is to enhance American-Romanian trade and investment, advance the American-Romanian bilateral relationship, and educate the public about its importance. It was launched on January 25, 2012 in Washington with an initial membership of 10. There are currently 16 AMRO member companies — Chevron, ExxonMobil, ADM, Smithfield, Raytheon, MetLife, Cargill, Amgen, Timken, Mega, Eli Lilly, Johnson & Johnson, Honeywell, Baxter, CNH, and Warburg Pincus — covering various business fields — energy, agriculture, defence, pharmaceuticals, processing industries, storage infrastructure and insurance.

4. IMF Publishes Fiscal Transparency Evaluation for Romania

In the press release sent by IMF, the institution says that Romania performs well against the standards set by the Fiscal Transparency Code in many areas according to the conclusions of a [Fiscal Transparency Evaluation](#) published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) today, and carried out at the request of the Government of Romania by a team from the Fund's Fiscal Affairs Department in February 2014.

Some 15 of the 36 dimensions in the Fiscal Transparency Code are rated as good or advanced, 15 dimensions are rated as basic, and 6 regarded as yet to be achieved. This reflects progress made in public financial management reform since 2010.

The report's key findings are summarized below:

Fiscal reports cover the general government in line with ESA 95 standards, but do not include the country's large public corporations sector, which accounts for around 10 percent of GDP. A large volume of data on general government operations, assets, and liabilities is produced, but these are not consolidated into set of financial statements produced in accordance with international standards;

Romania's budget process has improved markedly in recent years with the medium-term budget framework covering approximately 97 percent of central government expenditure and the establishment of independent fiscal oversight. However, high GDP forecasting errors, on average around 4 percent of GDP, weaknesses in the evaluation and oversight of public investments and lack of timeliness in approval of annual budgets suggest the need for further improvements.

Fiscal risk management is evaluated as advanced or good in identifying and reporting government guarantees and risks associated with sub-national governments but reporting on other specific risks, such as financial sector exposure and environmental risks, is limited, as is analysis of the potential fiscal impact of changes in the highly volatile macroeconomic environment.

This report makes a number of recommendations to strengthen the authorities' ongoing reform efforts in the area of fiscal transparency including:

- Expanding the institutional coverage of fiscal reports to include the wider public sector;
- Improving the quality and integrity of fiscal reports and financial reports;
- The inclusion of more detailed macroeconomic forecasts in key budget documents;
- Increasing the transparency of budget documentation
- Extending the analysis and reporting of fiscal risks.

Further information about the Fiscal Transparency Code and Evaluation can be found at (<http://imf.org/fiscaltransparency>).

5. Ludwik Sobolewski says Romania is the fastest evolving European capital market

The Romanian capital market is the fastest evolving in Europe, Bucharest Stock Exchange (BVB) CEO Ludwik Sobolewski told the 'Romania Investor Day' conference taking place in London.

The way the Romanian market changes in terms of quantity and quality allows it to be considered, in a professional manner the European market with the fastest evolution, even if it is still small and faces difficulties, Sobolewski said.

The BVB head underscored that this is not about removing barriers to capital flows, but about implementing measures capable of creating a competitive edge for the Romanian market over other markets.

Sobolewski mentioned in this respect two measures which, in his opinion, would make Romania a better place to invest, and not just "another market in Europe", specifically the scrapping of the dividend tax, proposed in the new Tax Code, and the creation of the AeRO alternative trading market for start-ups and SMEs.

Zero tax on dividends proves the economic intelligence of the Government, which has accurately calculated the impact versus the positive effects on market liquidity and solidity. Also, by the creation of AeRO, the primary role of any capital market is accomplished, namely that of supporting companies to obtain financing, attract capital.

Referring to the macroeconomic picture, the BVB official said that Romania is an example of growth in general and one of the few such examples in the region.



6. Aurelian Dochia: at present, Romania is in the best context over the last 6-7 years

Romania is among the European countries which managed to correct the imbalances accumulated before the crisis, its performance is good in the present European context, but not as good as regards the convergence towards the living standard of the EU countries, considers the economic analyst Aurelian Dochia.

‘At present, Romania is in its best situation over the last 6-7 years, since the beginning of the crisis (...). I think that they already feel a different level of general stability. Romania is on a trend which seems more stable than that of the last ten years’ stated Aurelian Dochia, in a conference organised by the Romanian-German Commerce Chamber.

According to him, Romania managed to pass successfully through a programme of stabilisation which included austerity measures and which could be considered a success at European level.

According to Dochia, Romania’s economy continues to present risks connected to internal and external factors. Among the internal factors which could generate risks, Aurelian Dochia mentions the possible changes at political level, the interruption of the agreement with IMF which, in a certain foreign way may increase the vulnerability of the Romanian economy, hasty measures of economic policies, such as the reduction of fiscality, which, although should stimulate growth risks to produce imbalances in the budget and instability.

The risks connected to external factors taken into consideration by Aurelian Dochia are the geopolitical tensions connected to the conflict in Ukraine which weaken the trust of investors and deteriorate the perspectives of growth in Europe, the continuation of the Greek crisis, as well as the consequences of the measures of economic policies taken by the big economies of the world – the US, Japan and China. As regards the business environment, the economist considers that this is little favourable. The companies in Romania complain about the difficulties in accessing the necessary factors for the expansion of the business, especially finances, qualifications and energy, the level of the taxes and the inefficiency of the fiscal administration, as well as serious problems with corruption and the political instability.

For the period to come, Aurelian Dochia estimated economic growth based on the advance of the internal demand supported by growing salaries, moderate inflation and the growth of the number of work places. After two years of contraction, public investment and private investment are expected to come back. At the same time, it is expected to have a growth of the absorption of European funds and attractive fiscality. Exports continue to grow, but in a slower rhythm, while the growth of imports will surpass the exports – the contribution of foreign exchanges to the GDP will be slightly negative. At the same time, ‘the macroeconomic balances are kept’ the analyst considers.



On the other hand, the EU has a growing deficit which seems to be persistent, Aurelian Dochia considers. According to him, there is the perspective that the annual rhythm of growth in the majority of the EU economies be under 2% for a long period, especially due to the fact that many countries have high levels of public debt.

7. European Commissioner Cretu appeals to Romanian government to double use of financial instruments in 2014-2020 period

European Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Cretu has recommended to the Romanian Government to double the use of financial instruments in the 2014-2020 period, mentioning that these instruments stimulate the joint use of public and private resources, which means "more resources at the availability of entrepreneurs."

"Our hope is to convince both the SMEs and the Government of Romania to use the initiative for small and medium-sized enterprises through a special operational programme, but also to actively use the financial instruments which, surely, mean a risk, but on the other hand also produce visible results, especially in Spain, Malta, and countries which have assumed this risk and are already using on a large scale the financial instruments. Furthermore, these instruments stimulate the joint use of public and private resources, which means more resources at the availability of entrepreneurs." Corina Cretu said.

She said that the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, "has a precise objective", and that is to double the use of financial instruments in the next seven years.

"I want to publicly appeal the Government of Romania: double the use of financial instruments in the 2014-2020 period. Mr Minister, I want to say that I searched last night for powerful arguments, because I know of this restraint to use financial instruments — and I want to say that I found an example in the Gospel of Matthew, where there is the Parable of the Bags of Gold. Maybe as such I will manage to convince the Government of Romania about how important the financial instruments are. I don't know how faithful you are, but, you know very well that a master, when he left on a journey, and bags of gold: to one he gave five, to another two, and another one. Those who received most invested them and made small businesses and gained more and the one who did not receive but one bag, for fear of losing it, hid it in the ground and guarded it. The ending you know very well: upon his return, the master rewarded the servants that proved entrepreneurship and scolded the fearful one, telling him that the one who has [invested] will receive and will do well, and to the one who has not will receive nothing. So, Mr Minister, I believe we must learn to invest intelligently the little we have and not bury it in the ground through grants, but multiply it by use of financial instruments", Cretu added.

She explained that the programmes of the Regional Development Fund "have offered, traditionally, aid in the form of grants, which means that once used the money is depleted".



8. Eurostat: Romania's economy recorded an advance by 0.5 % in Q4 2014

The GDP rose by 0.3 per cent in the Eurozone in Q4 2014 compared to the previous quarter and by 0.4 per cent in the European Union, whereas Romania's economy recorded an advance by 0.5 per cent, the European Union's Statistical Office Eurostat announced on Friday, in a press release.

According to some revised estimates made public on Friday by the Eurostat, the highest quarterly economic growths were recorded in Estonia and Sweden, both with an advance by 1.1 per cent, Hungary - 0.9 per cent, Germany, Spain and Poland - all with 0.7 per cent growth.

The Eurostat's data also show that, in year-on-year pace, in Q4 2014, compared to the same quarter in 2013, the Romanian economy recorded a growth double (2.5 per cent) compared to the EU average (1.3 per cent) or the 0.9 per cent advance recorded by the Eurozone's GDP. Economic growths higher than Romania's one were seen in Poland (3.2 per cent), Great Britain (2.7 per cent), Estonia and Sweden (2.6 per cent).

In Romania's case, the National Statistics Institute has informed that the GDP in 2014 was, in real terms, higher by 2.9 per cent than in 2013, mainly due to communications and industry. In the last quarter of last year, the GDP rose, in real terms, by 0.5 per cent compared to the previous quarter and versus the same quarter of 2013, it saw a 2.6 per cent advance in unadjusted terms and by 2.5 per cent in terms seasonally adjusted.

9. Gas deliveries through Iasi-Ungheni pipeline

Natural gas deliveries between Romania and Moldova through the Iasi-Ungheni pipeline starts, the premier of Moldova, Chiril Gaburici announced.

“The Iasi-Ungheni gasoduct will begin its activity. We have had talks about the gas pipeline which will allow us to cover our whole country with Romanian natural gas and set up a loyal competition in the energy market in Moldova.” Gaburici said at a press conference held next to the US deputy secretary of state Antony Blinken according to Unimedia.

The Iasi- Ungheni gasoduct was inaugurated on August 27, 2014 on Independence Day, a year after the launch of its construction, Radio Chisinau informed. The contract for gas deliveries from Romania through the gasoduct was signed on December 22, 2014 by authorities from Chisinau and Bucharest.

Since the beginning of the year Moldova has been buying natural gas from the Russian Federation at the price of 332 dollars/1,000 cu.m. When the contract was signed the Romanian gas was cheaper than the one imported from Russia by at least 50 dollars/1,000 cu.m. The pipe will be extended to Chisinau in order to reduce Moldova's dependence on Russian gas.



10. Romania exported cars and transport equipment worth 20.529 billion euros in the first 11 months of 2014

Romania exported, in the first 11 months of 2014, cars and transport equipment worth 20.529 billion euros, by 1.357 billion euros more than the level in the similar period of 2013, according to the data centralized by the National Statistics Institute /INS/.

The imports of cars and transport equipment were worth 19.071 billion euros, by 1.076 billion euros more than in the period January to November 2013, thus having recorded a surplus of 1.457 billion euros in this segment.

SOCIAL

2. Romanians, among the best integrated employees in the labour market in Germany

German Foreign Affairs Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that, according to a "representative" study conducted in Germany, Romanians are among the best integrated employees in the labour market in this country.

"A very surprising study has been recently released in Germany. The figures of this study - it is a very large, representative study - prove that the Romanians in Germany are among those employees who are best integrated in the labour market of Germany. This confirms a matter which we have already known before the study was released, when we said that Germany benefits in its turn from the labour of those citizens who work in Germany. They deserve our entire respect," Steinmeier said in Bucharest, in a joint press conference with Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister Bogdan Aurescu.

Steinmeier also said that in Germany there are approximately 350,000 Romanians and admitted that there have been "not very positive" stories about them. "I have always suspected that many things circulated in the public area are fed by preconceived ideas. I was confirmed this thing, that there have been such ungrounded preconceived ideas," Steinmeier added.



CULTURE

1. ARIES: Solutions and products 'made in Romania,' presented by 14 companies at the Mobile World Congress 2015

A number of 14 Romanian companies are currently showing solutions and products "made in Romania" at the world's largest mobile telephony and gadgets fair, Mobile World Congress (MWC), taking place in Barcelona over March 2-5, 2015.

Romania's participation in the MWC 2015 benefited from the support of the Romanian Association for Electronic Industry and Software, the Timisoara county branch, and that of the Ministry of Economy.

"This year, the strong point of Romania is related to the launch of new devices and solutions. We have 14 companies that are ready to impress the tech market with innovating services. We are at our fourth consecutive participation in the fair and every time we bring something new, as our contribution to the world's technological innovation revolution, this year being no exception," Daniel Giurea, CEO of ARIES-Tim said.

In 2015, Romania's presence in Barcelona is marked by the launch of products and presentation of solutions developed by Romanian companies such as the smart phones branded Allview, GPS applications, health monitoring solutions or simulators for the driving theory test, which facilitates learning of theoretical notions by those who want to get their driver's license.

Moreover, the Timisoara-based companies are going to launch such revolutionary fashion applications for mobile telephony that allow trying on clothes and creating one's own outfit directly on the mobile phone or applications that bring together all the known chat solutions or inedited grading solutions for pupils and high schoolers.

ARIES Timisoara includes more than 60 member companies at the present, covering all fields of the IT&C industry in Timis, Arad, Hunedoara and caras-Severin countries.

2. Richard Clayderman, on the Palace Hall stage in Bucharest, on March 26, alongside the Royal Chamber Orchestra and Razvan Mazilu

Famous piano player Richard Clayderman will appear on the Palace Hall stage in Bucharest, on March 26, alongside the Royal Chamber Orchestra and Razvan Mazilu, with the show being called "From Paris with Love", according to a release on Thursday.

The organisers promise "a unique show" in a setting especially made to remember Paris. The ballet will be led by prima ballerina Monica Petrica. The choreography belongs to dancer and choreographer



Razvan Mazilu, decorated by the President of Romania for his performance in art in 2004.

Over 100 musicians, dancers and technicians are working for this month's concert of Richard Clayderman in Bucharest.

The "From Paris with Love" show invites the audience to a romantic stroll on the streets of inter-war Paris. The two hours will include the Ballade pour Adeline piece that was sold in more than 22 million copies worldwide.

The show is for the first time brought in Romania by Phoenix Entertainment. Tickets are already selling in the Eventim network and partner shops.

Richard Clayderman was awarded no less than 267 golden disks and 70 platinum disks from the sale more than 150 million albums.

3. Goran Bregovic, in the first edition of the "Baro Foro", Bucharest, August 29

Goran Bregovic comes to Bucharest in the first edition of the "Baro Foro" (Big City in the Romani language) intercultural festival, the show of the artist going to take place at the Roman Arenas on August 29, informs a release of the organisers remitted on Wednesday.

Goran Bregovic comes to Bucharest together with the Wedding and Funeral Orchestra and has Mahala Rai Banda and Gipsy Casual as guests.

During his over 45 year career, Bregovic had collaborations with artists such as Iggy Pop, Eugene Hutz (Gogol Bordello) and Cesaria Evora, even composing soundtracks for renowned films such as "Time of the Gypsies," "Arizona Dream" and "Underground," all directed by Emir Kusturica.

"Champagne for Gypsies," his most recent album, launched three years ago, includes collaborations with Gipsy Kings and Eugene Hutz (Gogol Bordello). The album will also be presented in Bucharest together with the hits that made him famous, within an almost two-hour show. His music goes from tango to brass, and it is inspired by the Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Greek and Turkish cultures.

The tickets for Goran Bregovic' s concert can be purchased online on www.iabilet.ro and in the iabilet network (Muzica Store, Uman, Senia and the Perfect Tour agencies nationwide) for the following prices: the first 300 tickets of each category can be bought for 140 lei - A category, 80 lei - B category and 50 lei - C category.



After that, the prices will be: 160 lei - A category, 100 lei - B category and 60 lei - C category.

On the day of the concert the tickets will cost: 180 lei - A category, 120 lei - B category and 70 lei - C category.

Starting March 9, the tickets will also be available in the MOL filling stations network nationwide, which is iaBilet.ro new strategic partner.

4. Romania officially launched the bid to organize the 2021 Summer Universiade

The Student Sport Association and the Vasile Tomoiaga Association officially launched Romania's bid to organize the 2021 Summer Universiade, in an event held at the Faculty of Law in Bucharest also attended by President Klaus Iohannis.

At the launch were also, Minister of Youth and Sports Gabriela Szabo, chairman of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee (COSR) Alin Petrache, Minister of Education and Scientific Research Sorin Mihai Cimpeanu, Secretary-General of the International University Sports Federation (FISU) Eric Saintrond, chairmen of sports federations, Olympic, world and European champions, as well as a high number of journalists.

Adrian Socaciu, founder and chairman of the Student Sport Association, stated that this bid is a country project and the initiative was met with both skepticism and enthusiasm. "The organization of the 2021 Universiade is a country project and surmises a 12 day competition that will gather 9,000 athletes from 168 countries, in three mandatory sports disciplines and three at choice. Our country has previously organized this event in 1981 and came out second in the final nations' standings. The final decision will be adopted in November 2015. Romania needs such a project", stated Socaciu.

Gabriela Szabo hailed the initiative and promised the support of the Ministry she leads: "The Ministry of Youth and Sports [MTS] supports the organization in our country of such events that have a high impact on developing infrastructure, but also have effects in the labor market. It is a laudable initiative that the MTS supports".

Chairman of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee (COSR) Alin Petrache also joined the project: "We support Romania's participation in international competitions, but it is just as important to host in our country such manifestations. You have the COSR as an ally and partner in supporting of this project".

The Minister of Education and Scientific Research, Sorin Mihai Cimpeanu, stated, in his turn: "Our ministry stimulates the discovery and promotion of talents. I want to remind here the fact that we are organizing together with the COSR and ten sports federations the Gymnasium Olympiad and we have



signed the documents for the 2015-2019 period. We have in our country 22 university sports clubs that have garnered good results in the national and international competitions [they were part of]".

Secretary-General of the International University Sports Federation (FISU) Eric Saintrond showed in his speech: "Such an event is [important] not only for sports and the sports world, but also for the development of the entire country and I am thinking firstly of infrastructure. In a world dominated by drugs and illegal challenges we must promote the values of sport, the ethics of this domain and the fact that it is a very good opportunity for youths in the entire world to make friends. (...) I finally want to emphasize that in this country there is potential to hold such an event."

Former champion Nadia Comaneci has sent a video message in which she said: "Romania has hosted in 1981 a Universiade, I emphasize that our country is a territory full of champions and beauty. I am Nadia Comaneci and I support this initiative."

Another endorsement came from Prof. Dr. Mircea Dumitru, rector of the University of Bucharest: "It is a project with national and international vocation, a major impact. The Student Sport Association is supporting a noble cause. Although I am a philosophy professor for over 20 years, I am aware of the importance of sport in forming strong characters. The University of Bucharest will support to this project."

The Universiade is an international sports and cultural manifestation, organized once every two years in a different country, on the basis of a selection procedure drawn up by the International University Sports Federation, being the second sporting event by size after the Olympic Games.

The organization of the 2021 Summer Universiade will be the largest country project after joining NATO and the EU, the initiators of this project believe. For this plan to become possible the support of the Romanian Government is necessary in order to submit the bid towards the Federation of School and University Sports (FSSU) and pay the 10,000 euro submission fee, the deadline being March 31, 2015. Romania has received, in September 2015, the official invitation to participate in the procedure to submit bids for the organization of the 2021 Summer Universiade from FISU Secretary-General Eric Saintrond.

Romania has organized, up to now, a single Universiade, in 1981, it being the largest sporting event organized in our country until now. The 1981 Summer Universiade has enjoyed the participation of 2,930 athletes from 86 countries and over 200,000 spectators. In that year, Romanian athletes garnered medals in all the 10 disciplines of the Universiade and managed to take second place in the final nations' standings.

Romania's bid is supported by Romanian champions such as Nadia Comaneci, Andreea Raducan,



Sandra Izbasa, Corina Ungureanu, Ivan Patzaichin, Elisabeta Lipa, Valeria Racila, Mihai Covaliu, Nicu Vlad, Alina Dumitru, Doina Melinte, Maricica Puica, Carmen Bunaciu and many others.

5. The 33rd edition of the Romanian Tourism Fair, Bucharest, March 12-15

Exhibitors at the Romanian Tourism Fair 2015 (TTR) have prepared travel packages at discounts of up to 40-50 per cent for external destinations and up to 30 per cent for domestic destinations, Romexpo Director General Catalin Trifu told a TTR presentation conference.

"We are expecting the number of visitors to increase at this spring edition. While in March 2014, the tourism fair was visited by 25,000 people, we are expecting now 30,000 visitors, given that the entrance fee has been cut. Someone up there promised me there will be excellent weather for the fair. Men come to the fair and in two-three hours they get a picture of what can be chosen, then they go home and let the boss decide what is to be bought," says National Association of Travel Agencies of Romania (ANAT) first deputy chairman Alin Burcea.

The 33rd edition of the Romanian Tourism Fair is hosted by the Romexpo Exhibition Halls of Bucharest, March 12-15. Displaying in the event will be 280 exhibitors using 11,700 square metres to this end. Nearly one third of the exhibitors are from abroad, 14 countries in all, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Israel, Italy, Moldova, Poland, Serbia, Turkey and Hungary.

"Romanians currently prefer shorter but more frequent holidays. Bestselling are 5-7-day packages to the detriment of 12-14 day packages. Romanians have understood the need to go on a vacation every three-four months. We hope the spring edition of the next year will be held in late February, so that Romanians may enjoy early booking offerings, which close on March 1. Anyway, it is a big plus seeing how the Romanian seaside travel packages for November and December are sold," said Burcea.

Part of TTR, employers' associations will hold a travel exchange, a B2B event for professionals.

The fair can be visited Thursday through Saturday, 10:00 AM — 06:00 PM and Sunday, 10:00 AM — 04:00 PM. The entrance fee is RON 5.