



# ROMANIAN HEADLINES

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## POLITIC

### 1. President Iohannis met Speakers of the two Chambers of Parliament 'to establish legislative priorities'

President Klaus Iohannis met at the Cotroceni Presidential Palace the Senate Speaker, Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, and the Deputies Chamber Speaker, Valeriu Zgonea, 'to establish the legislative priorities for the next weeks and months.'

'The parliamentary session that kicks off today is offering us a chance to show the citizens that we all understood the message of those who cast a vote in November 2014. The country does not belong to us, to the political elite, and we must not monopolize the institutions and use them to our own benefit. The country belongs to the Romanian citizens and the institutions, the Presidency, the Parliament or the Government, must work for them. That's why, today, in the first day of the new parliamentary session of this year, I am receiving at the Presidential Palace the two Speakers of the Deputies Chamber and the Senate, Mr. Valeriu Zgonea and Mr. Calin Popescu-Tariceanu respectively, so that together we establish the legislative priorities for the next weeks and months,' the President said on Monday in motivating this meeting in a post on his Facebook page.

Participating in the meeting alongside President Klaus Iohannis will be also presidential advisers Dan Mihalache and Laurentiu-Mihai Stefan. The head of state last week held consultations with the political parties and the parliamentary groups discussing legislative priorities for the new legislative session. After the talks, President Iohannis announced that he agreed with the representatives of the parties and parliamentary groups to adopt a legislative solution at the end of the new parliamentary session that is about to start, regarding the electoral law package.

He pointed out that all prerequisites are there so that, in the shortest while, a solution regarding the simplification of procedures for the request of approval of detention, arrest or search of MPs can be found.

### 2. President Iohannis: In this session, I will introduce a national defence strategy to Parliament

President Klaus Iohannis said on Monday he will introduce to Parliament in the ongoing session a national defence strategy. 'My respect to Parliament is also expressed by me carrying out my

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presidential duties. In the ongoing session, I will introduce to Parliament a national defence strategy in accordance with the Constitution,' Iohannis told Parliament.

He added that he is ready to mediate sensitive issues, mentioning cybersecurity to the point. 'There is readiness on my part to mediate sensitive issues where the absence of dialogue has led to blockages. Cybersecurity legislation is such a theme. I believe we can find a balance between the need for increased security justified by the new international realities and the defence of inalienable individual rights and freedoms, on which a democratic society is built,' Iohannis explained. The President finds it natural for each party to have a vision and themes they want to steer to their electorate's content.

'Big expectations can lead to big achievements. When people look at us closely and hopefully, there are all the reasons for us to be more mobilised and more responsible. The partnership I have mentioned does not entail us agreeing on everything, because that is what democratic mechanisms, majorities and votes are for. I find it natural for each party to have its own vision and themes they want to steer to their electorate's content, but what I mean here is a partnership steeped in dialogue and respect toward which everyone contribute their own approach in order to improve what is left behind them,' said Iohannis.

### **3. President Iohannis, in official visit to France**

President Klaus Iohannis was paying an official visit to France, where he'll meet his counterpart, Francois Hollande, the Senate Chairman, Gerard Larcher, the President of the National Assembly, Claude Bartolone and representatives of the Romanian community in France.

President Klaus Iohannis is paying an official visit to France on Tuesday, where he met his counterpart, Francois Hollande, the Senate Chairman, Gerard Larcher, the President of the National Assembly, Claude Bartolone and representatives of the Romanian community in France.

#### ***Hollande on Schengen: Romania is ready to take on some commitments***

France's President Francois Hollande said in relation to Romania's accession to the border-free Schengen Area that the country is ready to take on some commitments.

'We have agreed that the incoming European Council summit should make decisions to control the movement of persons, the PNR (e.n. — passenger name record) as well as decisions to oversee the Internet and to allow the destruction of websites that allow radicalisation. (...) Romania (...) is ready to take on some commitments. I want us on Thursday at the European Council summit to coordinate on all border dispositions in order to better control arrivals and departures in Europe. That way we will be able to prevent the departure of combatants and be informed about their whereabouts,' said Hollande



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after meeting Romania's President Klaus Iohannis in Paris, in relation to the incoming summit on Thursday.

The French President also mentioned having discussed with Iohannis of the commercial exchanges between France and Romania. 'France is present in Romania, having conducted sizeable investments over the past years and we want to further such investments,' said Hollande. He added that Renault is contributing 3 per cent toward the formation of Romania's Gross Domestic Product. 'Continuing is in the interest of both countries. Romania's balance of trade will stand to gain from the relationship with Romania,' said Hollande.

He added that there are shared interests between the two countries also in infrastructure, transport, energy, including nuclear power, services, with new technologies, as well as defence.

As far as cultural exchanges between France and Romania are concerned, Hollande said France wants the year 2018, the centennial of modern Romania, to be a very important year, adding that France will mobilise itself for the anniversary.

***President Iohannis: I asked France to support Romania's accession to the Schengen Zone***

President Klaus Iohannis on Monday asked France to support Romania's accession to the Schengen Zone, voicing hope at the same time that a positive decision to this end may be adopted as soon as possible.

'I asked France to support Romania's accession to the Schengen Zone. I expressed my confidence that a positive decision regarding our joining the Schengen Zone may be adopted as soon as possible,' President Klaus Iohannis said at the Elysee Palace, where he participated in a joint press conference with his French counterpart, Francois Hollande. He showed that the landmarks of the bilateral relations between Romania and France are about economic cooperation based on a common desire to strengthen and diversify cooperation in numerous fields of activity.

The Romanian head of state also pointed out that a very important aspect for the authorities in Bucharest he discussed with President Hollande was related to Romanias and the Romanian community's image in the Hexagon. 'We are confident that such disparate facts, when treated with lucidity and moderation, cannot bring a long term negative effect on a relation of mutual respect and political and cultural cooperation. I asked Mr. President Hollande to support our efforts in combating any such discourse reducing such a solid relation to a mere series of cliches,' said Iohannis.

He showed that he also discussed with the French President about priorities at European level and the fight against terrorism. Moreover, the head of state said he reviewed with the French counterpart the concerning events in the eastern vicinity of the EU and also the modalities to help some of the states in the region in getting closer to the EU sooner.



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"The Republic of Moldova remains a major priority for Romania, with our main objective to encourage this country's European aspirations, by supporting the implementation of Moldova's agreement with the EU as much as we can at the level of the Union," said the head of state.

He also mentioned that he had an exchange of opinions with the French President about the situation in Ukraine, on which occasion he reiterated Romania's firm support for maintaining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country.

President Iohannis showed that he discussed with Hollande about the economic developments in the EU and measures to bolster economic growth and employment. "I expressed Romania's support for a series of priorities on the strategic agenda of the EU, especially for stimulating investments, economic growth and cutting unemployment, fields that allowed us to talk about certain common views of Romania and France," said the head of state.

He also said he intended to return to all these topics during the meetings with the other high-ranked officials that he will have on the occasion of his visit in France. "This is a way of emphasizing once again that I will continue to consider our relation with France as a priority likely to generate a natural need for maintaining a permanent dialogue between the two states," concluded the head of state. President Klaus Iohannis is paying an official visit to France on Tuesday. The head of the state was welcomed by the French counterpart with a military ceremony held at the Hotel des Invalides. He had a series of face-to-face meetings and a working lunch with President Francois Hollande, the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls also participating.

Later, Klaus Iohannis had official talks with the President of the Senate of the French Republic, Gerard Larcher, and the President of the French National Assembly, Claude Bartolone. Moreover, the Romanian head of state is going to meet the representatives of the Romanian community in France at the headquarters of the Romanian Embassy in Paris.

On Wednesday, Klaus Iohannis will go to Brussels, where he is set to participate on Thursday in the EPP Summit and the informal meeting of the European Council.

President Klaus Iohannis on Monday invited his French counterpart, Francois Hollande, to pay a visit to Romania, while saying that for Romania the relation it has with France is a priority.

"The bilateral relation between Romania and France, materialized through the Strategic Partnership, is not only based on its political dimension, but it is also about cooperation in some other very rich sectors. I have reaffirmed the fact that Romania treats its relation with France as a priority and also the wish to further strengthen this relation, including within the EU. I have addressed to you an invitation, Mr. President, to pay a visit to Romania to hasten the pace in the development of bilateral relations and



I hope this [e.n. - visit to Romania] will become possible very soon,' President Klaus Iohannis said at the Elysee Palace, where he participated in a joint press conference with his French counterpart, Francois Hollande.

He showed that the invitation extended to him by President Hollande represented 'a strong symbol of how important the bilateral relation between Romania and France is both for Romania and the French side.'

'I was glad that Mr. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mr. Minister of Economy were also able to participate in the talks. I was pleased with the substantiality of the discussions that we had,' said Iohannis.

#### **4. President Iohannis participated at the informal European Council meeting**

President Klaus Iohannis on Thursday had a brief discussion with German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the beginning of the informal European Council meeting in Brussels.

This is the first time when Iohannis participates in a meeting of the EU heads of state or government. The President of Romania will also attend the separate working dinner for the EU heads of state or government.

On the sidelines of the EU summit, President Iohannis will meet with his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko, official sources inform.

At the end of the European Council meeting, the Romanian President will hold a press briefing at the European Council.

#### ***President Klaus Iohannis had a meeting with EPP President Joseph Daul in Brussels***

President Klaus Iohannis has had in Brussels, a meeting with the European People's Party (EPP) President, Joseph Daul, on the occasion of the EPP summit and ahead of the European Council's informal reunion, the Presidential Administration informs.

The main topics on the two's agenda were the current geopolitical situation regarding the peace negotiations in Minsk, Ukraine, the region's situation and Romanian's domestic policy in the first months since the President, Klaus Iohannis took office.

The head of state is participating for the first time in a reunion of the European Council. He will partake in this informal meeting with the President of the European Parliament and in the separate working dinner of Heads of state and government of the EU member states.

Around 20:10 (Bucharest Local Time), the President will deliver a press statement at the European Council.



### ***President Iohannis met his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko in Brussels***

President Klaus Iohannis met his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko on Thursday in Brussels, on the sidelines of the informal meeting of the European Council. They discussed bilateral relations and regional matters, official sources said.

According to these sources, the two heads of states talked for about 30 minutes, after the European Council meeting.

'President Poroshenko paid a visit to our representation. He saluted people in Romanian. The dialogue was about the future of bilateral relations, the mutual support for bilateral projects, and some regional topics. (...) It was a very warm meeting. They [the two presidents] recalled being in Paris,' sources said.

Poroshenko declared he invited Iohannis to visit Kiev very soon and appreciated their meeting was 'useful.'

'I want to thank the President of Romania for the firm stance in support of Ukraine. We had a very important bilateral dialogue and I invited him to visit Kiev. He accepted my invitation and we're expecting him in Kiev very soon,' the Ukrainian head of state pointed out.

### **5. Gov't to focus on economic, fiscal areas, welfare measures in current legislative session**

The economic and fiscal areas and the welfare measures are among the targets of the Government in the current legislative session, as present by Prime Minister Victor Ponta to a plenary sitting of the Chamber of Deputies on Monday.

Ponta stressed that 'the 12 areas that I present the Chamber of Deputies, the main targets /.../ start from the assumption of stability and co-working between the Parliament and the Government, which have made us have growth in the last three years and see a cut in unemployment. The number of the jobless was cut by 140,000 Romanian citizens in 2014 alone. /.../ The inflation in 2014, at 1 percent, was such as to keep the prices under this level of the inflation'.

He stressed that there are two landmarks for the parliamentary session having begun on Monday: the legislative measures aimed at the continued economic growth and a goal 'that can only be attained by the collaboration of the Parliament and Government on the long term', namely that an important part of the growth should be directed to the citizens by more fair distribution and by keeping the social balances.

Ponta also announced that the Government will present the new draft Fiscal Code and Fiscal Procedure Code to the legislature. He said another target of the executive are the welfare measures. Ponta



explained such measures will include the annual index-linking of pensions, doubling the child benefits in the disadvantaged families, the indexation of the benefits for the disabled.

#### **6. PM Ponta: No agreement with IMF and EC; gas price increase, energy industry restructuring, to be discussed**

Prime Minister Victor Ponta announced that the Government did not reach an agreement with the international financial partners about the increase in the price of natural gas and the restructuring of the Hunedoara and Oltenia energy complexes, for which reason a letter of intent will not be signed yet, adding that the rest of the objectives are fulfilled.

According to the Prime Minister, the agreement is in force and the two issues will be discussed again in April. 'Many of the important objectives for Romania of the new undergoing agreement are fulfilled — and this means the economic growth objectives, the budgetary discipline, which, however didn't prevent implementing the measures on increasing the minimum wage, the pensions, the gradual reduction in the social insurance contribution by 5 percentage points, did not generate a catastrophe, but begins producing the anticipated positive effects,' the Prime Minister told a press conference at the Palace of Parliament.

The measures left to be discussed, he added, are of a structural nature, with an important economic and social impact.

One of these measures refers to continuing the agenda of gas prices liberalisation.

'Regarding all the industrial and non-household consumers, Romania, starting January 1, no longer has a regulated market. The household consumers and the thermal power stations are the only ones that remained on the regulated market. The request of the EC, IMF and World Bank delegation referred to a quite sudden increase starting April 1, from 53 to 62 lei per MWh, which we see as unsustainable,' the Prime Minister showed.

The second point on which the sides 'did not agree' refers to the future of the coal-based energy producing industry, and the Government did not agree with 'the massive and radical restructuring' of the Hunedoara Energy Complex and of the Oltenia Energy Complex.

'We have stated very clearly that we agree to measures for making the system more efficient, but we shall not accept measures through which this sector, essential to our energy security, to the security of the energy system and to the economic and social development of some regions, measures which may lead to the disappearance of this industry on medium and long term,' Victor Ponta argued.

The Prime Minister mentioned that Romania's agreement with the international financial partners is to cease in September this year.



'The important thing is that, until then, we should see how much we have accomplished of what we have planned. At the same time, we have also taken measures which our partners did not initially accept, such as the VAT reduction for bread, the social insurance contribution reduction. They didn't agree, we have done it and it turned out well,' Victor Ponta added.

## **7. PM Ponta visited the US to meet American politicians and companies**

The premier Victor Ponta went to the US for approximately one week where he will meet in Washington and New York representatives of some American companies, as well as political leaders, official sources stated. 'The visit had an economic character, but there will also be political meetings' the quoted sources showed.

Last week before the government meeting, premier Ponta met at the Victoria Palace the business attaché of the US Dean Thompson. After that discussion, the premier asked the ministers to make an 'update' of the roadmap for the commercial area with the US, showing that it is necessary to open the road for American investors so that the strategic partnership be efficient from an economic point of view not only political or military.

### ***Hagel Meets With Romanian Prime Minister at the Pentagon***

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel met with Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta at the Pentagon to discuss NATO and coalition operations, according to a senior defense official, defense.gov informs.

Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby summarized the meeting, reporting that Hagel thanked Ponta for the Romanian government's offer to commit more troops to the mission in Afghanistan, as well as Romania's continued strong support in other NATO and coalition activities. Kirby noted that Hagel and Ponta met briefly last June when the secretary travelled to Constanta, Romania, to thank U.S. and coalition troops at Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base.

"In his concluding remarks, Minister Ponta thanked Secretary Hagel for his attention to Black Sea security issues and his stewardship of the Department of Defense during a period of unrest for NATO allies," Kirby said.

### ***PM Ponta had a working meeting with US Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker***

Prime Minister Victor Ponta, within the visit he is paying to the USA, had a working meeting with US Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker, informs a Government release

According to the cited source, the two officials agreed that an economic mission organised by the US Department of Commerce will visit Romania in May, one of the main interest areas being that of information technology and cyber-security.



At the same time, during the meeting the two assessed the progress made in implementing the bilateral Action Plan for the improvement of the business environment of Romania, in which context the US official voiced appreciation for the recent measures taken by the Romanian Government based on the consultations with the business environment established in the format of "The Coalition for Romania's Development."

"The two dignitaries agreed the main thematic priorities for the future stage of the Action Plan on the bilateral cooperation in the economic and commercial area, among which energy, cyber-security, strengthening the administrative capacity, in order to come to the aid of the concerns of the business environment," the Government announces.

Moreover, the Romanian Prime Minister and the US official reconfirmed "the common concern for consolidating the economic dimension of the Romanian — US Strategic Partnership, which is a priority to Romania's Government."

***PM Ponta had a meeting with the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)***

Prime minister, Victor Ponta has had a meeting with the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), John Brennan, where both underlined the progress recorded within the Romania-US Strategic Partnership, the Romanian Government informs in a press release.

"On this occasion, progress within the Strategic Partnership between Romanian and the United States, were highlighted. On this meeting, the CIA Director reaffirmed his appreciation for the excellent collaboration relation with the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) and the Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE) and the role assumed by Romania in the region," the mentioned release adds.

Victor Ponta also chaired on that very afternoon, in Washington, a round table organised by the American-Romanian Business Council, an event which regrouped significant companies within AMRO, such as ADM, Allied TechSystems, Amgen, Boeing, Cargill, Chevron, Coca-Cola, Ellicott, ExxonMobile, General Electric, Lindsay, Mega, MetLife, MoneyGram, Pike Energy, Raytheon, Smithfield, Timken, and was hosted by the AMRO Chairman, Eric Stewart.

**8. ForMin Aurescu tells Ukraine Romania expects mobilization to not be 'selective'**

Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister Bogdan Aurescu met Ukrainian ambassador in Bucharest Teofil Bauer on Tuesday, on which occasion he communicated the Romanian side's expectation that the partial mobilization carried out amid the conflict in eastern Ukraine should not have a 'selective' character and should avoid 'discriminatory approaches that might target ethnic grounds as well'.

The foreign minister communicated the Romanian side's expectation that the implementation of the relevant legal provisions for the partial mobilization in Ukraine should not have a selective character



and should be achieved in accordance with the concerned normative framework, in an impartial, transparent and predictable manner, by avoiding any discriminatory approach that might target ethnic grounds as well', the Foreign Affairs Ministry said in a release.

As regards the fourth phase in the partial mobilization process in Ukraine, Aurescu said Romania 'is closely watching' the manner in which this process is being conducted and is in constant contact with the ethnic Romanians' representatives and the representatives of the civil and military Ukrainian authorities via the General Consulate in Cernauti and Odessa.

The two officials discussed the security situation in Ukraine as well as the results of the extraordinary meeting of the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council from Jan. 29, with emphasis on the prospects facing the talks on reaching a solution to the armed conflict in southeastern Ukraine, the release said. The Romanian minister condemned the stepped up violence in southeastern Ukraine and the attacks on civilians.

'Aurescu with regret evoked the lack of positive results of the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group held in Minsk on Jan. 31. He said that the proposal of the separatists in Donetsk and Lugansk regions to review the Minsk documents is the more worrying, as is their lack of openness to discussing the critical aspects relating the civil population in southeastern Ukraine, the implementation of a ceasefire and withdrawing the heavy weaponry', the ministry underscored.

Bauer thanked for Romania's support amid the security developments in eastern Ukraine and with respect to the achievement of the partial mobilization, 'he assured the minister that the Ukrainian authorities will enforce the legal provisions by excluding any form of discrimination, on ethnic grounds included'.

According to the release, the ambassador voiced appreciation for the contribution of the Romanian minority based in Ukraine to the effort of the Ukrainian society and state to combat the breakaway phenomenon in eastern country.

#### **9. ForMin Aurescu says surprised at allegations of Romanian weapons having been delivered to ISIL**

Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister Bogdan Aurescu welcomed Iraqi ambassador to Romania Omer Berzinji on Monday, with the minister voicing 'the Romanian side's surprise' at the allegations made by an Iraqi lawmaker and recently circulated in the news media that Romania were involved in an alleged transfer of weapons to ISIL.



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According to a release sent by the foreign ministry, such information was 'firmly' denied by the Romanian side. Aureescu underscored that 'such untrue allegations can negatively affect the profile and reputation of Romania as well as the bilateral relations of Romania and Iraq', the ministry said. 'Ambassador Omer Berzinji stressed that the opinion presented in the concerned press report does not represent the official stand of the Iraqi Government, but they are strictly personal opinions expressed by the concerned member of the Parliament in Baghdad. Minister Bogdan Aureescu noted the position of the Iraqi Government, which believes such allegations are not true to reality', the release added. On the other hand, the two officials also tackled the current phase in and the prospects for the development of the bilateral relations.

Aureescu said the Romanian-Iraqi relations record 'positive dynamic' and expressed the Romanian authorities' openness to capitalising on the many opportunities at hand. 'The two officials underscored the mutual interest in deepening the bilateral economic and commercial relations, with the Romanian minister thus proposing the achievement of a new meeting of the Joint Commission on Economic, Commercial and Technical Cooperation later this year as well as updating the bilateral legal framework', the ministry stressed.

Aureescu also reiterated Romania's constant commitment to combating international terrorism and the continued support to Iraq on a political level and for improving the humanitarian situation. 'Both sides highlighted the convergence of the security interests and the very good level of the cooperation on defence. The Iraqi ambassador said Romania is a very good partner of Iraq in all fields, a context in which he expressed Baghdad's appreciation of the support rendered Iraq in the developments recorded after 2003, including by Romania's writing off part of the debt owed by Iraq. He also thanked for the consistent position of Romania in the fight against terrorism', the release said.

### **10. DefMin Mircea Dusa met his British counterpart Michael Fallon**

The security situation in the extended Black Sea region, Romanian-British cooperation, as well as topical issues on the agenda of NATO ministerial meeting currently taking place in Brussels were discussed by the Romanian Minister of Defence Mircea Dusa with his British counterpart Michael Fallon.

According to a release of the Ministry of National Defence, the meeting took place on the sidelines of the meeting of defence ministers from NATO members states held in Brussels.

While referring to cooperation between the two armies, Dusa appreciated UK's commitment to strengthening cooperation with Romania in strategic dialogue and security fields.

The two officials underscored the importance of concrete decisions to be adopted at the meeting on continuation of NATO's measures to ensure security and the implementation of the Action Plan meant



for increasing the Alliance's operational capacity. Thus, they underscored the importance of creating such command-control structures on Romania's and the Eastern European allied states's territory, as part of allied measures adapted to the new security environment.

Given the deterioration of security in the Black Sea region and recent developments in Ukraine, Minister Dusa insisted on the need to continue and even strengthen security measures by the Alliance in 2015.

The British Minister of Defence voiced solidarity with Romania's concerns and highlighted the London authorities' intention to firmly support adaptation and security measures in the current strategic context.

Michael Fallon mentioned also mentioned the decision to strengthen participation of British troops in drills organised in Romania, as part of the security measures, as well as the concrete participation with military personnel in building command-control structures to operate in Romania. The UK will play a lead role in a "high readiness" Nato force that will be established in Eastern Europe, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon has announced. Britain will send up to 1,000 troops and four RAF Typhoon jets for "air policing" in the region, he said, quoted by BBC News.

The multinational force is the biggest reinforcement of Nato's collective defence since the end of the Cold War. Fallon said the UK would contribute manpower to two regional headquarters in Poland and Romania, and to force integration units in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

BBC diplomatic correspondent Jonathan Marcus said the move was aimed to reassure Nato countries in eastern Europe and deter what is perceived as a potential Russian threat.

Nato secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg has said that Russia continues to violate international law as fighting continues in Ukraine.

### **11. NATO will set up two command and control centers in Romania**

Two NATO command and control centers will be set up in Romania in 2016, where military personnel from Romania and other member states will activate, defence ministers from NATO member states decided.

They decided, at the meeting of defence ministers held in Brussels, to set up units for the integration of NATO forces in eastern allied countries - Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The units will be multinational command and control structures to ensure a visible and continuous NATO presence on the territory of eastern allies.



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Besides that center, Romania will host a South-Eastern Multinational Command division acting as a command-control center in case forces are deployed on the eastern NATO side. “After joining NATO in 2004, the measures approved today for Romania are very important, we might say even historical, for re-enforcing the NATO and EU eastern border. These multinational command-control structures represent the materialization of a decision made at the 2014 summit about ensuring a visible and persistent NATO presence on the territory of other allied countries. These units will have a key role for ties between national and NATO forces, ensuring control and command elements in situations in which the new Alliance response force is deployed,” said defence minister Mircea Dusa in Brussels on Thursday.

He pointed out that ministerial talks had decided on applying measures to make the *Very High* Readiness Joint Task Force - Spearhead Force - operational, presented by NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg on Thursday. An interim solution of the program, with the contribution of Germany, Holland and Norway will be tested in 2015.

The two centers in Romania will be implemented in 2015 and placed at NATO disposal as of 2016. Military personnel from Great Britain, USA, Canada, Bulgaria, Turkey and Poland will come to Romania.

Great Britain will play a leading part in the NATO Rapid Response Force in Central and Eastern Europe and will send troops in Romania and Poland, said the British defence secretary Michael Fallon, quoted by BBC News online.

Great Britain will send 1,000 military personnel and four Typhoon fighter planes for the new rapid response force, Fallon said. He pointed out that NATO credibility in the present security risks depends on the role played by each country.

Defence ministers of NATO member states met in Brussels to discuss details of setting up the *Very High* Readiness Joint Task Force - “Spearhead”

## **12. Romania chairs the 53rd session of the U.N. Social Development Commission**

The Romanian resident representative at the United Nations, ambassador Simona Miculescu is chairing the 53rd session of the U.N. Social Development Commission being held in New York over Feb. 4-13, the Foreign Affairs Ministry announced in a release on Thursday.

The main focus of the debates is 'Re-thinking and Consolidating the Social Development in Contemporary World', the ministry added.

'Amid the celebration of 20 years since the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the



Commission has the opportunity to analyse the developments recorded up until now in the area of social development and re-think social development in the context of the new realities. At the same time, the debated topic encourages an analysis of enhancing the way that the aspects relating the social development are reflected in the Post-2015 Development Agenda', Miculescu told the official opening segment.

The foreign ministry stressed that Romania, by taking upon itself the chairmanship of this commission subsidiary to the Economic and Social Council once again proves 'its strong commitment to the development of an inclusive social system based on quality, efficiency, equal opportunities, supported by the values and principles of democracy, rule of law, human rights and dignity'. Prosecutors reopen cold case on 1990 miners' riot

### **13. The General Prosecutor's office announced the reopening of the case of June 13-15, 1990 miners' riots, which had been closed in 2009.**

Several people were killed or wounded by gunshots in the events known as 'Mineriada,' which were subsequently investigated for years. Criminal prosecutors eventually closed the case in June 2009; the military prosecutors now partially invalidated that decision.

The reopening of the case must be submitted to a preliminary court within the High Court of Cassation and Justice, Romania's Supreme Court, a media release of the General Prosecutor's office mentioned on Thursday.

## **ECONOMICS**

### **1. European Commission upgrades Romania 2015 growth estimates to 2.7 pct**

The European Commission has upgraded its estimates of the Romanian economic growth in 2015 up to 2.7 percent as compared to 2.4 percent growth it had predicted in November, shows the winter forecast made public by the European Union executive.

"Economic growth in Romania is forecast to stay above potential, at 2.7% in 2015 and 2.9% in 2016, powered by domestic demand and also supported by the gradual recovery expected in the global economy. Private consumption is expected to remain robust, as growing wages, low inflation, falling interest rates and improving labour market conditions are all supportive for the purchasing power of households", the Commission report says.

After two years of contraction, both private and public investments are forecast to start recovering. Given the strength of exports, the growth contribution of net exports continued to be positive in 2014. Exports are forecast to continue increasing in 2015 and 2016 thanks to the expected recovery of



Romania's main trading partners, but the pace of growth will be somewhat slower. Imports, however, are expected to rise at a faster rate, propelled by the strengthening of domestic demand. The growth contribution of net exports is expected to turn slightly negative in 2016, the report shows.

"Risks to the macroeconomic and inflation outlook appear broadly balanced. Downside risks include faster-than-expected deleveraging and the impact of a further deterioration in geo-political tensions from the Ukraine-Russia conflict hurting market confidence and the economic outlook in major trading partners. Upside risks are related to stronger-than-expected effects from the EU Investment Plan and actual implementation of more structural reforms", the document stresses.

The inflation will remain moderate, to hit 1.2 percent annual average in 2015, inflation, mainly due to the significant decline in energy prices, subdued inflation in the EU and lower inflation expectations. In 2016, inflation is forecast to accelerate to 2.5% as the recovery in domestic demand continues, the Commission predicted.

Fiscal consolidation to continue in 2015 .In 2014, the budget deficit is estimated to have decreased to 1.8% of GDP, from 2.2% in 2013. An increase in excise duties on fuels and the introduction of a special construction tax outbalanced the impact of lower social security contributions following a rate cut of 5 pps., which took effect on 1 October 2014, and the tax exemption on reinvested profits. Tax collection improved in late 2014 following subdued performance earlier in the year. Capital expenditure decreased significantly from 2013. The government budget deficit is forecast to decrease further to 1.5% of GDP in 2015, as a reduction in tax revenues is outweighed by reductions in expenditure, expressed as a fraction of GDP, the report said.

## **2. Isarescu: annual inflation will be close to zero in February and is kept under the variation level until September**

The annual rate of inflation will be placed under the minimum level of the variation interval, 1.5 respectively, until the end of September of this year, the lowest point being in February when it gets closer to zero, mainly due to the low prices for oil on an international level and the embargo imposed to Russia which leads to the redirection towards the Romanian market of a surplus of food, stated on Monday the governor of the National Bank of Romania Mugur Isarescu in a conference for the presentation of the quarterly report on inflation.

‘The projected trend includes the annual rate of inflation under the low limit of the variation interval around the central target until the end of Q3 2015, followed by the maintenance to inferior values to the



central target of 2.5% until the horizon of the prognosis (the end of 2016). The lowest point of inflation is in February, after which, due to the basic effect, even if the monthly increase is extremely low, we will have increase of the indicators (IPC) due to the basic effect until September' explained the BNR governor.

According to BNR estimates, in January 2015, annual inflation will be around 0.3% and in February the indicator is expected to get to zero. Moreover, for the whole year of 2015, the central bank estimates that the inflation rate will depend on the basic effect. 'In the summer of last year we have sensible negative increase. As a consequence, we might have the following scenario: monthly increase zero, in exchange, due to the basic effect which acts differently, the indicator will increase with the negative of last year. And this is the main motivation for the inflation curb: the basic effect' Isarescu explained.

According to the quarterly report on inflation, the causes for the upward deviation of inflation from the established trend could be the volatility of the capital flows addressed to emerging economies, in the context of reamplification of geopolitical tensions, the perspectives of evolution of the economies of the euro zone ( in the context of the situation in Greece) and major emerging ones. At the same time, a risk of growth over expectations of the consumption prices comes, according to BNR, from the uncertainties regarding the firm implementation of the set of structural reforms and measures agreed with the international institutions.(EU,IMF,WB).

BNR revised, recently, the inflation prognosis for 2015 from 2.2% to 2.1%and for the end of the year 2016 announced a prognosis of 2.4%. The stationery target on medium term is 2.5% plus/minus a percentage point.

### **3. Isarescu: Romania comes on the foreign markets in February-March**

Romania intends to issue Eurobonds on the foreign markets in February-March and the discussion about the conversion of the loans in CHF to the historic exchange rate could have as impact the increase of CDS, which means higher costs for one issue of one billion euro, says the BNR governor Mugur Isarescu.

'As the example of Poland is continuously given. They have just discussed about the historic exchange rate and their CDS went up by 15-20 points. Don't forget that February –March was announced as Romania wants to go out on the international markets of capital. There is no use to get more expensive loans. For a loan of one billion, do you get how much is 0.2 – 0.3 0 0.5%? Supplementary costs' Isarescu said.

CDS (credit default swap) represents the cost of debts insurance of Romania against non-payment risks.



At the beginning of the year, the officials of the ministry of finances stated that Romania intends to sell bonds on the foreign markets in the first part of the year and tried to expand the average maturity of the debt by the sale of Eurobonds with maturity of over ten years.

'If we keep to a new crisis, as we had no problems with the banks until now, as the budget did not give a leu to capitalise banks, they paid in '98, we could do it' the head of the central bank said.

Previously, Isarescu stated that the transformation in lei of the loans in CHF at the historic exchange rate would generate losses for the banks which offered loans of 5.7 billion lei, representing 0.8% of GDP, and a surplus of 20% as the consumers require, they would get to losses of 4.5 billion lei (0.6% of GDP).

#### **4. Germany accounts 20 % of Romanian exports**

President Klaus Iohannis asserted that roughly 20 percent of Romania is carried out with Germany, 'an authentic European model' in terms of innovation, a release of the Presidential Administration informed.

The President delivered a message on the New Year reception of the Romanian-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, through his advisor for economic policies Cosmin Marinescu. The text says 'in this post-crisis stage, Romania needs a new model of economic development, along the axes of competitiveness and innovation, from the point of view of its own assets.'

Iohannis mentioned the systematic invoking by businesses of the need of investment capitals and financing.

'Money is not necessarily the issue, however; it is rather the quality of policies to attract it, either we mean foreign investments or European funds. Thus, the generic theme of your event - innovation - is perfectly circumscribed within the exigencies of a new economic vision on medium and long term. And Germany reveals, from this point of view, both examples and opportunities. In the field of innovation, Germany is an authentic European model. Germany is ranked among the first in Europe in terms of financing the research and development (approximately 3 percent of the GDP), of technology intake by companies and of research partnerships between industry and universities,' the President said in his message.

According to Iohannis, Romania will thrive 'to the extent we really appreciate productive work and a hierarchy of values, to the extent we reward efficiency as much as we can and we stop wasting.'

'Romania will be competitive to the extent we improve the institutional quality of business. In the innovation equation, some institutional factors that directly impact the business performances are vital: bureaucracy, corruption, payment of taxes and duties, easiness of launching or terminating businesses.



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Innovation does not occur anywhere or anyhow, but when and where there are economic stimuli, freedom of entrepreneurial initiative, clear and stable rules offering predictability to businesses, especially in fiscal terms. From these points of view, we have much to catch up, not just in fiscal, budgetary and financial terms, but also as an exercise of governing predictability in general,' the head of state wrote.

He also pointed out the good economic cooperation between Romania and Germany, with bilateral trade exceeding 20 billion euros last year.

'We are glad, on the other hand when - at least as regards the cooperation between Romania and Germany - there are signs of performance and hope. For instance, Germany is Romania's main trade partner. The bilateral relations have seen a significant development over the past years. In 2014, for the first time, Romanian exports to the German market reached 10 billion euros, while bilateral trade exceeded 20 billion euros. Thus, approximately 20 percent of Romania's foreign trade has Germany as partner. Also a good omen for the amelioration of competitiveness is the fact that more than three quarters of the Romanian exports to the German market consist in products with high value added,' the President mentioned.

Iohannis's message asserts that 'the consolidation of the economic cooperation between Romania and Germany is also a priority in investment terms, not just in trade ones.'

'The bilateral trade still has many comparative advantages that could be used. Exports from Romania are just 1 percent of the overall German imports - compared to Poland and the Czech Republic, with more than 3 percent each; this figure is even lower as regards the weight of Romania's imports in the overall German exports. Therefore, the consolidation of the economic cooperation between Romania and Germany is also a priority in investment terms, not just in trade ones,' he added.

He also voiced his belief that economic relations with Germany 'can be expanded and enhanced in the fields of innovation and technology transfer.'

'Foreign investments are undoubtedly the essential source for supporting and encouraging innovation through know-how and technology transfer, and attracting such foreign investments should be the absolute priority of any economic strategy,' Iohannis declared. He also congratulated the Romanian-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry for 'its special mission, in which it innovates beneficially, continuously and on long term, for Romania, for Germany and for the economic performance in general.'

The New Year reception gathered business people and specialized associations, representatives of the diplomatic corps, of the government and of other Romanian authorities.



## **5. Romania looks to revive Type 22 frigate upgrade programme**

Romania is set to rekindle long-delayed plans for the Phase 2 modernisation of its two Type 22 Batch 2 frigates, the head of the Romanian Navy has revealed.

Addressing the IQPC Surface Warships 2015 conference in Genoa on 28 January, Rear Admiral (UH) Alexandru Mirsu, chief of the Romanian Naval Forces Staff, told delegates that the Romanian Navy was now looking to revive the Phase 2 upgrade during the course of 2015. "Our current thinking is to fit a modern combat management system, introduce a 3-D [surveillance] radar," he said, "and then to put some 'kinetic' equipment on board in terms of anti-surface and anti-air missiles, and a close-in weapon system."

Rea Adm Mirsu added that there had been an intensive debate on anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. "The water conditions in the Black Sea are very unusual," he said, "but we will also use the Type 22s for international operations so we must think about what type of towed array ASW sonar we need."

Acquired from the United Kingdom in 2003, and commissioned into the Romanian Navy in September 2004 and April 2005 respectively, the frigates Regele Ferdinand (ex-HMSCoventry ) and Regina Maria (ex-HMS London ) form the Frigate Flotilla together with the indigenously-built frigate Marasesti . Entering service in 1985, Marasesti was conceived on the basis of Soviet doctrine and equipment.

Regele Ferdinand and Regina Maria received a basic Phase 1 modernisation as part of their regeneration in the UK prior to transfer. This included the addition of a 76/62 Super Rapid gun; a new gun fire control system - as an adjunct to the legacy CACS-1 command system - based on NAUTIS 3 processing and a System 2500 electro-optical director; and the installation of DL-12T decoy launchers. The ships are now also able to embark an IAR-330 Puma helicopter in the ASW role.

Romania had planned to commence a Phase 2 modernisation - adding enhanced command facilities, improved self-defences and an offensive anti-surface warfare capability - during the late 2000s but this plan was put on hold owing to funding shortfalls.

Other additional capabilities being sought in the scope of the Phase 2 programme include an improved electronic warfare suite, and small-calibre guns for force protection.

No firm timetable was disclosed by Rear Adm Mirsu, although he did state that the Romanian Navy expects the Phase 2 modernisation to keep the two Type 22s viable for between 10 and 20 years additional service. "We will keep Marasesti in its current configuration through to the completion of the Type 22 modernisation," he added. "After that we have to decide on a Marasesti replacement...either a



'light frigate' or a 'heavy corvette'."

#### *COMMENT*

Although the two Type 22 Batch 2 frigates are NATO Level 2 certified, the limitations of their installed command, sensor and weapon fit, particularly with regard to situational awareness and self-defence, necessarily restricts their current utility. The planned Phase 2 upgrade would enable the ships to be deployed in support of higher intensity NATO tasks. (Source: <http://www.janes.com/>)

### **SOCIAL**

#### **1. Govt takes a decision on paid child labour**

The Government passed a decision on paid child labour, a media release informs.

Minors can work as actors, musicians, dancers in theatre, opera, ballet, circus, contests, films, radio, commercials, photo ops or professional sports, based on contracts signed by their parents or legal tutors, or by children over 14 years of age with the legal consent of their parents or tutors.

The government decision sets several conditions for child work: no dangerous conditions, limited hours according to child's age, limited number of hours per day or week, including breaks.

Parents or their legal representatives agreed with the employers must be present at all times during the work, and the public social assistance service must be notified beforehand.

Also, money earned by children must be used in their superior interests; suspicions of other uses are followed by a request of the social assistance to see a report on the administration of the child's income. If justifications are insufficient, the social assistance service can notify a court.

Parents or legal tutors who breach the child labour regulations are subject to fines between 1,000 and 8,000 lei.

### **CULTURE**

#### **1. The ice tourist complex at Balea Lake will be open on Friday by the German Ambassador in Bucharest**

German Ambassador in Bucharest Werner Hans Lauk and veteran musician Ovidiu Lipan Tandarica - who serves as Romania's tourism ambassador worldwide - opened the only ice tourist complex in the



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country, located at over 2,000 meters altitude at Balea Lake in the Fagaras Mountains, the organisers announced.

The complex includes the Ice Hotel that opened last year, the already consecrated Ice Church and the nearby igloos.

"In all these years I have been living in Germany, that is for half of my life, I promoted Romania. You have to unconventionally love Romania and carry it in your soul," Ovidiu Lipan declared last year, on the occasion of the opening of the ninth "Ice Hotel" season.

The 2013-2014 season was inaugurated in the presence of Chinese Ambassador to Romania, Mrs. Huo Yuzhen, who promised back then that she will promote our country and the Fagaras region in particular; one of TV spots for the international promotion of Romania was translated into Chinese and broadcast in China. For every season, the Balea Lake "Ice Hotel" invites an ambassador to help showcase the image of Romania in the country he or she represents. Attending the event this year will be German Ambassador Werner Hans Lauk.

This winter, the image of the Balea Lake "Ice Hotel" is a young hope of Romanian ballet, Francesca Baciu - who already holds a brilliant track record - and who will shoot on the occasion a photo session designed to promote Romania's image in the world; Francesca will also be the subject of a photo contest organised at Balea Lake.

Another special guest at the season-opening ceremony is Swiss chef Jakob Hausmann, who will feature three special culinary events in February, March and April, at the Balea Lake "Ice Restaurant" inside the "Ice Hotel". Jakob Hausmann is a celebrity master chef at a restaurant in the historic center of Bucharest.

This season, the Ice Hotel opened to the public on December 23. True to tradition, the Britons were the first guests, booking all the rooms for Christmas and New Year's celebrations.

## **2. Berlinale 2015: Radu Jude's "Aferim!"**

Romanian director Radu Jude addresses the prickly subject of gypsy slavery with his third feature, a western-style historical drama which is competing for big prizes at the Berlinale 2015, *hollywoodreporter.com* reads.

A harsh history lesson leavened by bawdy humor and classic western elements, *Aferim!* dramatizes the



formerly taboo subject of gypsy slavery that flourished in Romania for centuries, and was only finally abolished in 1856. Handsomely shot in luminous monochrome on 35mm film, director **Radu Jude's** third feature premiers in the main competition section in Berlin today. It feels like a strong prize contender based on its striking look, timely subject and surprisingly funny script.

Jude's two previous features, *The Happiest Girl in the World* and *Everybody in our Family*, were darkly funny satires about the strained economic and social fabric of contemporary Romania. Both picked up multiple awards at Sundance, Berlin, Sarajevo and other festivals. His new film shares the same sardonic tone but brings a more ambitious scope and more explicitly political resonance. *Aferim!* opens domestically next month, with further festival bookings likely to follow. It will be a tough sell for overseas distributors, but smart niche players may be swayed by the prospect of releasing Romania's answer to *12 Years a Slave*.

Contemporary anti-Roma racism in Eastern Europe has inspired a crop of powerful movies in recent years. But *Aferim!* digs deeper into the historical roots of this timely subject as Jude and his co-writer, novelist **Florin Lazarescu**, draw on real accounts of gypsy slavery for inspiration. Crucially, they also manage to make this grim topic both funny and personal, not a dour social-realist sermon.

Titled after an old Turkish word meaning "bravo!", the story takes place in the mountainous southern region of Wallachia in 1835, a time when Romania was still caught in the imperial crossfire between Turkey, Russia and Austria. **Teodor Corban** stars as Costandin, a boisterous police constable employed as a bounty hunter by local nobleman Boyar Iordache Cindescu (**Alexandru Dabija**) to recapture Carfin (**Cuzin Toma**), a fugitive gypsy slave who made a potentially deadly error by giving in to the sexual demands of his master's wife Sultana (**Mihalea Sirbu**).

Scouring the majestic mountain landscape on horseback with his callow teenage son Ionita (**Mihai Comanoiu**) acting as his deputy, Costandin recalls **John Wayne** in *The Searchers*, only with the racist and sexist subtext of John Ford's iconic western writ large. He also loves the sound of his own voice, forever sharing his pompous wisdom and salty humor with anyone who will listen. He has a special fondness for bawdy rhymes, crude aphorisms and bitter curses. "May he live three more days, counting yesterday" he sneers after a fractious encounter on the road.

Costandin and Ionita apprehend Carfin, picking up another runaway gypsy slave in the process, a skinny little boy called Tintiric (**Alberto Dinache**). As they journey home, father and son celebrate by sharing the services of a prostitute at a rowdy inn ("don't tell your mother"). But on learning that their prisoner faces punishment for sexually humiliating his master, Ionita raises ethical questions about returning him. As a compromise, both agree to ask the nobleman for leniency. However, Cindescu disdainfully swats away their pleas before personally enforcing his brutal revenge.

A veteran of various key Romanian New Wave films including *12.08 East of Bucharest* and *4 Weeks, 3*



*Weeks, 2 Days*, Corban manages to invest his flawed anti-hero with a rough-hewn affability. Costandin may spout racist slurs against Jews, Turks, Russians, Italians and others, sounding like he belongs in a 19th century prequel to **Spike Lee's** *Do The Right Thing*, but Jude does not judge him too harshly, presenting him as a product of his times. There are also solid, unshowy performances from Romanian TV star Toma, and from Dabija and Sirbu, both well-known theater directors. The 17-year-old Comanoiu makes a quietly impressive screen debut too.

Like its main characters, *Aferim!* meanders a little in its opening act, which is essentially a string of random conversations on horseback. The slender plot, fairly unsympathetic protagonists and steady flow of coarse, slang-heavy Romanian dialogue may also test the patience of viewers expecting a more conventional costume drama. But do not be fooled by the playful, irreverent tone. Behind its attractive surface sheen of lusty humor and ravishing visuals, this Trojan Horse drama makes some spiky topical points about the lingering toxic effects of slavery, feudalism, misogyny and racism.

On this occasion, National Tourism Authority (ANT) president Simona Man will meet Israeli Tourism Minister Uzi Landau, Chair of the Association of Tourism Agencies of Israel Eyal Sellouk, as well as Romania's Ambassador to the State of Israel Andreea Pastarnac, shows an ANT release on Tuesday. The ANT president will also have meetings with Deputy Tourism Minister Amir Halevi and with the Representative of the Romanian Patriarchate at the Holy Places and Superior of the Romanian Settlement of Jerusalem, Jericho, and Jordan, Archimandrite Teofil Anastasoiaie.

On the first day of the fair, the National Tourism Authority together with Romania's Embassy to Israel organises a seminar about Romania, 'Romania — 365 days to explore the Carpathian Garden.' The event is aimed at drawing the attention of the Israeli citizens to Romania's tourist offer.

According to the data presented by the National Institute of Statistics (INS), Israel is on the third place in the ranking of the countries generating tourists to Romania. In 2014 only, over 130,000 Israeli citizens visited Romania, by 44.5 per cent more than in the previous year.

During the professional conferences to take place at the IMTM, the participants will discuss about the major changes the tourism industry underwent over the past years, as well as the current important events. One of these topics is the influence of low cost flights, cruises, which are gaining an increasing market share among all classes of tourists, the development of technologies for tourism and the "hot" trends in the tourism industry in 2015.