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ROMANIA'S EMERGING FOREIGN POLICY: EVIDENCE FROM BASESCU'S TRIPS TO MOSCOW, LONDON, CHISINAU

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 000476

SIPDIS

STATE DEPT FOR EUR/NCE - WILLIAM SILKWORTH

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SUBJECT: ROMANIA'S EMERGING FOREIGN POLICY: EVIDENCE FROM BASESCU'S TRIPS TO MOSCOW, LONDON, CHISINAU

REF: BUCHAREST 429

Classified By: Political Section Chief Robert S. Gilchrist for Reasons 1.4 B and D

1. (C) Summary. Romanian President Traian Basescu will likely seek to focus on solid support in Iraq and the Global War on Terror, Black Sea Security, and Moldova during his March 8-9 trip to Washington. He has defined a strong strategic relationship with the U.S. as the central component of his new center-right government's emerging foreign policy.

Initial bilateral visits to Moscow, London, and Chisinau provide an indication of these and other priorities - and demonstrate that he intends to be actively engaged in the formulation and articulation of Romania's foreign policy. Although Washington will not be Basescu's first trip as president, he clearly views it as the most important. End Summary.

ROMANIA'S PROACTIVE FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

2. (C) In the two months since his inauguration, center-right President Traian Basescu has sought to demonstrate a strong and active international role for Romania and for his

presidency. He has repeatedly asserted the importance of a close strategic relationship with the U.S. and U.K. ("a Bucharest-London-Washington axis"). However, this is coupled with another Romanian foreign policy priority of EU accession in January 2007. Our GOR contacts have tried to obscure potential incongruities in those two priorities by flagging the strategic nature of the first set of relationships and the largely economic content of the second. (Comment: Reality is a little more complicated.) The new Government has also increased focus on Romania's eastern frontier, seeking more direct engagement in Moldova; and coordination with the U.S. and NATO for a regional strategy for the Black Sea (Ref). These themes were evident during Basescu's first three bilateral visits abroad -- to Chisinau, London, and Moscow. They will also be raised when Basescu travels to Washington in March.

3. (C) At the same time, Basescu's direct and highly personal approach has, in the words of our MFA interlocutors, "refreshed and revived" Romania's foreign policy on many levels. Regarding Basescu's recent Moscow trip, FM Ungureanu told Ambassador Crouch that an initially taciturn President Putin quickly warmed to Basescu. The latter was reportedly frank and focused on the future, declining to revisit historical issues -- such as disappearance of the Romanian national treasure that came under Bolshevik control in WWI -- that were irritating constants on the bilateral agenda in recent years. The UK Embassy in Bucharest reports that PM Blair found Basescu "easy to talk to" and "credible" in his commitment to fight corruption. Local media remarked that Basescu's warm reception by Moldovan President Voronin contrasted sharply with the typically strained meetings between Voronin and former President Ion Iliescu. Basescu has stressed his belief privately and publicly that Romania and Moldova are "two nations, one people."

BASESCU AND PUTIN: MOLDOVA, BLACK SEA, TRADE

4. (C) FM Ungureanu told assembled NATO and EU Diplomats that Basescu's February 14-15 trip to Moscow focused on three central issues -- Moldova and Transnistria, Black Sea stability and security, and the potential for increased commerce between the two countries. On Moldova/Transnistria, Basescu proposed bluntly to Putin an enlargement of the five-party negotiating format to include Romania. Basescu told Putin Romania belonged at the table, if only because Transnistria threatens regional stability and serves as a haven for organized crime that filters into Romania. The Romanian government, according to Ungureanu, believes expansion of the five-party talks would add "energy and momentum" to the stalled dialogue. On upcoming Moldovan elections, Basescu underscored to Putin that Romania seeks a fair process "free of political intervention."

5. (C) Basescu also raised with Putin his vision of Black Sea regional cooperation, stressing concerns with trafficking of humans, weapons, narcotics and other contraband in the Black sea basin. Ungureanu told Ambassador Crouch that Putin proposed, apparently spontaneously, a "common naval unit"

comprised of vessels under national flags that would work in coordination against organized crime using the Black Sea for transiting. The Romanians were non-committal (and GOR interlocutors have told us separately that the GOR opposes a "constabulary" expansion of BLACKSEAFOR, preferring a NATO-led security presence in the Black Sea). Basescu raised the possibility of a permanent U.S. military basing presence in Romania, emphasizing that they should not be interpreted as a sign of hostility to Russia. Putin answered that the transfer of U.S. bases eastward from Germany has "no political reason" but has potentially "unpleasant implications."

6. (C) With regard to commercial relations, Basescu proposed the possibility of up to six new Romanian Consulates General throughout Russia to help Romanian firms identify export opportunities at a local level. Both Basescu and Putin acknowledged the pronounced trade disequilibrium between the two countries, with Russian energy flowing to Romania and "not much" returning to Russia. Ungureanu stressed that Basescu and Putin met in Moscow for a total of three hours, both a message that Basescu and Putin had enjoyed a substantive exchange and a clear hint that the Romanians want as much time as possible for Basescu's meeting at the White House.

7. (C) During the Ambassador's farewell call on Basescu February 17, the latter related that it appeared that Putin was desirous of an improved relationship with Romania, possibly, he speculated, as a result of recent events in Ukraine and Georgia. Regarding Moldova/Transnistria, Basescu confirmed that Putin had not responded explicitly to the Romanian request for inclusion in the multiparty negotiating format. Shifting the focus of that part of the discussion, Putin responded that Transnistria's Smirnov is obstructing movement of munitions out of depots there. This answer, according to Basescu, "is a joke."

BASESCU AND BLAIR: IRAQ, EU, AND TRANSATLANTIC TIES

8. (C) The British Embassy has told us that HMG made "every effort possible" to ensure London was Basescu's first bilateral visit to a Western capital, a gesture they made with some haste after the Romanians quietly passed word that a French invitation was already on the table and that they preferred not to take it up as the first major Western visit for the new President. This lay in the emerging close relations between the two governments -- the GOR, even under the previous center-left government, frequently looked to the UK as a model of an EU country with strong transatlantic ties. Basescu has been outspoken in asserting that the UK will be the "first" among Romania's European allies. The British DCM noted that HMG views Romania as a future "ally" among EU countries.

9. (C) Basescu's January 31 meeting with PM Blair focused on the continuation of Romania's troop presence in Iraq, UK-Romanian cooperation on the UN Security Council, the fundamental importance of fighting corruption (which Basescu has identified as a "national security priority"), and issues

surrounding Romania's EU accession. Basescu pledged to keep Romanian troops in Iraq "until they are no longer needed." He also raised repeatedly Romania's strong hope for a regional approach toward the Black Sea, to include EU and especially NATO involvement. He told Blair that over the past 15 years Romania had found that it could "rely most" on the U.S. and UK among the Western governments to be "straightforward" and "truly supportive" of Romania's efforts towards integration with the West. Basescu's new emphasis on this trilateral relationship, which he has repeatedly characterized as the "Washington-London-Bucharest axis" was based as much on common strategic interests as it was on "common values and a common vision." Blair committed to examine ways the UK could work with Romania on a Black Sea regional policy, including within the framework of the European Security and Defense Policy.

BASESCU AND VORONIN: PULLING MOLDOVA WESTWARD

10. (C) MFA interlocutors including the FM stressed to post that Basescu's January 21 visit to Moldova signaled a new "proactive approach" to Romanian-Moldovan relations, to include "a more direct role" in breaking the impasse in the frozen conflict in Transnistria. The GOR is "surprised and pleased" with what it views as "a positive attitude" by Voronin, which may be partially driven by Moldova's upcoming elections but which they also see as indicating a more fundamental shift in Moldova's foreign policy. GOR officials affirm that Romania -- and Basescu -- are eager to use this opening to pull Moldova towards Europe and the West.

11. (C) Ungureanu told Ambassador that Basescu stressed that Romania offered the "only opportunity" for Moldova to move closer to the EU. Basescu underscored to Voronin that "Romania will advocate for Moldova in Brussels." Ungureanu said Voronin "switched off" when Basescu asserted that Romania could also advocate for Moldova with NATO. Ungureanu agreed that this might be a red line Voronin is unable to cross at present, with Russian troops still in Transnistria. Basescu pledged to Voronin to share Romania's European integration experiences through formalized consultations between GOR and GOM officials. He affirmed Romania's support for Voronin's proposed draft document on Stability and Security in Moldova, and said Romania would be in a better position to advocate for EU agreement to the document after the finalization of Romania's EU accession agreement in April. Our MFA interlocutors note that the substance of much of Romania's Moldova policy tracks largely with that of the previous government. However, in the same breath they note that Basescu's level of interest, commitment to encouraging resolution for the Transnistria frozen conflict, and emerging good relationship with Voronin indicate Romania seeks to be much more involved than in previous years.

COMMENT

12. (C) Presidential advisors have told us Basescu "greatly looks forward" to his March 9 trip to Washington, given the central importance he ascribed to strong transatlantic

relations throughout his campaign and in the early days of his presidency. His staff is working assiduously to try to diminish potential sore points during the trip. While a proposed international commission to resolve pending inter-country adoption cases is still under consideration, one key presidential expressed hope for an announcement within the next week of a process to strip extreme nationalist Corneliu Vadim Tudor of a prominent award given by the previous government. In addition, Basescu will no doubt wish to discuss in Washington the prospects of a permanent U.S. military basing presence in Romania. The issue continues to receive broad public attention - and support. Post will send an update on Romania's EU accession bid septel. And finally, all interlocutors from the President on down note that the extradition and Romanian trial for the Marine Corps Staff Sergeant involved in the December automobile accident killing a well-known Romanian musician will be put on the table.

13. (U) Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNet website:
www.state.gov/p/eur/bucharest
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