

POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Perspectives
on Foreign
and Security
Policy

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A DEFINING MOMENT FOR THE ROMANIAN DIPLOMACY: BUILDING RESILIENCE AND CRISIS CONTAINMENT TOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The coronavirus pandemic is one of the major crises of our generation. But as we widen our perspective, it is only part of a chain of transformative events in modern history, marked by revolutions, wars, natural catastrophes or global competition – all leading to significant shifts in the way we think and act.

Putting current developments into perspective is an essential step in understanding how the world order changes and how much damage could irrational resistance to change do, as opposed to building smart resilience capacities and effective crisis containment tools.

The pandemic and the multilevel crisis that followed forced us and is still forcing us to change habits and routines, not only on a personal level, but also as diplomats and public servants. Many analysts are already talking about a so-called ‘new normal’, which we are rapidly adjusting to, while striving to find new and innovative solutions to everyday problems.

The current pandemic will not stop the world from revolving and evolving, but will call for adjustments to our global order and its underpinnings. Pandemic-related challenges are coupled with pre-existing crises, transformation processes and rapid technological developments. There is no escape from the reality that we must act wisely to make sure that we are choosing the right path and the right balance in order to keep the world human-friendly and human-centred, without sacrificing our core principles and beliefs. We will witness how new standards will emerge, and one must be no prophet to

foresee that who sets those standards will have immense power on the new equilibria of competing values and perspectives.

When it comes to foreign policy and diplomacy, the greatest expression of a solid, value-based approach is strategic persistency and coherence in times of crisis. The ability to always keep a strong set of principles in sight and to act accordingly, even more so in times of crisis, allows sound decision-making processes which are consistent with a country's national interests and the well-being – in a wider sense – of its citizens.

All areas will be affected by the 'new normal' well beyond managing the pandemic. From how international law will be treated in areas like human rights, democratic institutions and practices, free trade or technological development, to how international security or cooperation will be evolving, all this is at stake.

Experiencing the crisis – a view from the Romanian Diplomacy

The crisis that we are all currently experiencing has challenged individual nations as much as it has impacted our global system of alliances and, to some extent, made some question the core principles and values that drive foreign policy priorities of democratic nations.

No early warning or foresight mechanism could have predicted the intensity of the current crisis, and the world is still assessing its long-term impact. This process has pushed diplomatic services worldwide, including the Romanian one, to step up the effort of drawing key lessons learned and the effort of adapting their mechanisms, instruments and behaviours, according to foreign policy commitments and national interests.

For the Romanian diplomacy, the complex character of the current crisis translated into extensive challenges, unique in terms of diversity and scale in our post-1989 democratic history.

However, for Romania, the current crisis has strengthened awareness of how important it is to preserve the fundamental pillars of our foreign policy: our ambition to elevate our country's role and profile

within the European Union and NATO, while developing and deepening our Strategic Partnership with the United States, as well as our inherent attachment to international law and a rules-based global order, multilateralism and democratic values.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I was and still am in permanent dialogue with counterparts from EU member states and neighbouring countries. My main purpose was to ensure the defence of Romania's strategic interests, to support Romanian citizens in sensitive situations, including seasonal workers, cross-border workers and freight carriers, respectively for the timely resolution, as far as possible, of other sensitive situations that have arisen in the current context. Together with my colleagues from EU member states, I was keenly aware that our success will not only impact the effective management of the pandemic but also how the EU is perceived.

Hundreds of thousands of requests coming directly from Romanian citizens from all over the world were addressed by Romanian diplomats and consuls, who have often risked their own health in their efforts to provide consular assistance. The consular dimension of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' operations has been playing a central role, reaffirming the need of constant investments in solid consular capacities, as well as the need to develop efficient instruments at national level to provide for rapid responses in crisis situations.

In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has started, in May 2020, a reflection process so that we can translate our own experience into robust, long-term mechanisms for efficient crisis control. One of this process' outcomes proved to be a crisis management guide to serve as a more general knowledge basis for Romanian diplomats and consuls.

Since the beginning of the crisis and up until flights resumed, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has contributed directly to the repatriation process for over 12,500 Romanian citizens. We also activated the EU Civil Protection and Consular Assistance Mechanism, which enabled us to support 200 Romanian citizens who returned home from third countries.

The Ministry also stepped up communication efforts, issuing hundreds of press releases and travel alerts, based on direct contacts with virtually all countries, in order to inform Romanian citizens in real time.

The lessons of the current crisis must be scalable and enshrined in our future ways of action – whether we consider the key importance of ensuring transport corridors for people and goods inside the European Union, the repatriation of Romanian citizens or the support we provide for other state authorities in their efforts to deliver vital supplies. The lessons of the pandemic must not be limited to consular action but extended to all facets of the diplomatic activity, which has changed the way in which we meet, negotiate, and cooperate.

It is also worth mentioning here that Romania was the first EU member state to host the strategic *RescEU* stockpile of medical equipment, consisting, among others, of ventilators and protective masks. In the past months this already facilitated deliveries of such equipment in support of EU countries, such as Italy, Spain, Lithuania, but also neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans, such as Montenegro and the Republic of North Macedonia, specifically for Covid-19 pandemic management efforts.

Romania was also the first Allied state to access and benefit from the Strategic Airlift Capability, developed under NATO's aegis, to bring medical supplies from South Korea to my country, at the beginning of the crisis. It is also a particular source of pride that, in a long tradition of Romanian women aviators, a Romanian pilot, commander Simona Măierean, is the first woman to pilot such strategic lift aircraft delivering material to Allied nations.

Lesson learned: effective, pragmatic and innovative multilateralism

Maybe one of the most important lessons learned by all states affected by the coronavirus pandemic was the universal value of solidarity in crisis.

While domestic measures were and are critical to keeping worrying trends at manageable levels, it is joint leadership, international solidarity and cooperation that will ultimately define the outcome of the crisis for individual countries and for our multilateral system. Bearing this in mind, we placed solidarity and cooperation at the heart of all Romanian foreign policy efforts by actively supporting regional partners and the international community in the fight against the pandemic. In this regard, as the crisis unfolded, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the organisation of Romanian medical missions to countries like Italy, Republic of Moldova and the US.

Our diplomatic engagements were also supported by direct financial contributions. In response to international calls for solidarity, Romania contributed 200.000 Euros to the Global Coronavirus Response fundraiser organised by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in May 2020.

In support of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, a team of 52 Romanian medical personnel and experts went to our neighbouring country, to support their colleagues there; at the same time, Romania provided medical aid worth 3.5 million Euros, consisting of medical equipment, medicines and sanitary materials, and facilitated the repatriation of many citizens of the Republic of Moldova and the transport of goods.

The Romanian Government also approved humanitarian aid worth 1.75 million Euros to support the fight against Covid-19 in Ukraine. We applied the same principle of solidarity when we supported the adoption of financial aid packages for Eastern Partnership states and duly endorsed the *Team Europe* concept.

In this difficult, unpredictable and fluid context, all efforts to adapt – without sacrificing our values, foreign policy commitments and national interests – are part of a learning process at all levels and come down to one simple principle: to adapt is not to change the fundamentals of foreign policy but to perfect those instruments that have proven their efficiency and worth over time.

At multilateral level, the pandemic crisis has exacerbated the complex and permanent interdependence between domestic and foreign policy making. This could also be translated as the interdependence between the need to ensure the security of citizens, inside and outside physical borders, on one hand, and the need to ensure a functional global order, on the other. Nowadays more than ever before, security must be acknowledged at large by also considering its healthcare and human dimension and the supporting institutional architecture.

In this context, unilateral action is neither sustainable nor effective in times of crisis. Multilateral action and cooperation, even if at times flawed and imperfect, are preferable to a politically-driven self-isolation. Adaptation, in this scenario, means acting towards increasing the effectiveness of international cooperation for rapid crisis responses based on international law and by employing inclusive instruments.

At a time when countries around the globe were closing down their borders and were fueling a harsh competition for strategic resources, the importance of an effective, innovative and pragmatic multilateral system was convincingly reaffirmed.

Take the example of the EU. Measures such as the regulation of transport corridors for ensuring the functioning of the Internal Market and access to essential goods, the launch of joint procurement procedures for medicines and medical equipment, the creation of a strategic reserve of medical equipment, the cooperation for the repatriation of EU citizens, as well as multiple decisions and new instruments with regulatory and financial impact, speak of the EU's striving to adapt its own rules to the benefit of member states' mutual and separate crisis containment efforts. The current economy recovery plan and the Union's future Multiannual Financial Framework have set a level of ambition that is essential for the bloc's recovery efforts and future.

Take the example of NATO. It played an important role in managing the effects of the pandemic by successfully putting its already existing instruments into motion, such as the Euro-Atlantic Disaster

Response Coordination Centre and the Strategic Airlift Capability, which benefitted multiple allies in urgent need of medical equipment, including Romania.

Multiple examples of successful multilateral and bilateral cooperation can also be cited, and there are positive examples all over the world and in several international organisations, good practices of cooperation, adaptation to the new reality and prospects for strengthening resilience.

Lesson learned: strengthening resilience

The current crisis' first stage was dominated by examples of unilateral action, motivated by the lack of resources and essential supplies at national level to fight the pandemic effectively and to act in solidarity with other states. The many examples of unilateral action to degrees unimaginable before revealed our shortcomings in terms of resilience, as well as the fragility of our global supply chains. Those problems can be addressed efficiently only in accordance with our foreign policy commitments and with the observance of international law. In this context, *we must grasp the importance of another lesson learned: strengthening resilience at national and multilateral level is essential.*

Strengthening resilience has many facets, both domestic and foreign, although distinctions are often purely theoretical. Because resilience is not only about strengthening the capacity to counter diverse crisis situations such as this pandemic, hostile acts, hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns that seek to weaken our values, beliefs and trust, it is also a value-anchored notion, inseparable from such values as democracy, good governance, accountability, functional institutions serving the citizens and the rule of law.

In order to strengthen resilience, it is essential for every democratic actor to identify vulnerabilities and critical needs and to be adequately prepared. That is where capacities for anticipation, prevention and reaction have to be, separately but coherently, built.

Strengthening resilience also requires a two-way external action. On the one hand, we must reduce our dependence on global actors who do not act in accordance with our value systems and who may eventually try to divert us from following our foreign policy commitments.

On the other hand, we must focus on strengthening relations with like-minded partners in the European Union, NATO and beyond, who share our objectives and ways of action when it comes to strengthening resilience. Resources for effective crisis management in conditions of high pressure are not limited to essential equipment and goods – trustworthy, reliable partnerships are equally important in order to avoid unwanted pressure.

Lesson learned: consolidating transatlantic ties and ‘clearing the air’ around the debate regarding EU’s strategic autonomy

While debating about resilience, consolidation of the transatlantic relation comes as a clear and logical step in the current context. This approach is rooted in Romania’s foreign policy strategic priorities.

The transatlantic relation is of vital importance for our Western civilisation since what ties us together is much more relevant and profound than any temporary differences. Romania aims to further deepen and expand its Strategic Partnership with the US, enlarge the United States’ economic footprint in our region and consolidate US military presence on the Eastern Flank and the Black Sea region, as coordinates of our response to ongoing security risks.

The EU and the US are part of the same community of values and security, and it has become even more obvious that we can only increase our resilience together; there is no choice to be made here. There should be a choice between cooperation and unilateral action, in favour of the former.

If we aim to discourage unilateral action, which has a disruptive effect on the international order and the multilateral system, then we should promote respect for rules, for the international rule of

law and for democratic values, no matter how difficult it is to do so at certain moments in time, keeping in mind the goal of ensuring long-term peace and security.

Global crises cannot be addressed through individual action. As argued prior, such challenges call for strong partnerships and networks of like-minded states that value the international order, testing the resilience of their institutions, public order and – particular to this crisis – healthcare systems. This is the framework in which, in my opinion, the concept of EU's strategic autonomy must be analysed, as it mainly refers to national and EU-level resilience and the way in which these two levels share competences in crisis scenarios. In the absence of EU-level competences on healthcare, for example, the effectiveness of European action depends on the level of crisis containment preparedness of its member states – or, in other words, their resilience.

Thus, we must acknowledge that, the better prepared the member states are for managing a crisis on an individual level without sacrificing solidarity, the better the EU response and assistance will be. The EU can help member states enhance their preparedness, as proven by the financial package and the economic relaunch plan, which include significant funding for an authentic Union of Health project in the near future.

Therefore, understanding EU's strategic autonomy is tied not only to solidarity, but goes much further into the way in which we understand and act upon the principle of subsidiarity.

Lesson learned: promoting international law and democratic values in times of crisis

The lessons drawn from the current crisis are also linked to the general understanding of the interaction between foreign policy and international law, which defines our commitments at the regional, European, and multilateral level. Foreign policy-makers employ

The spread of the pandemic was accompanied by heightened geopolitical tensions at global and regional levels, on land and at sea, an economic crisis (bordering on recession) quite different from the previous global downturns, and an infodemic upsurge (battle of narratives) which spared no individual connected to the internet, from global leaders to every citizen. All were faced with renewed dichotomies: performance of democracy vs. autocracy, guns vs. butter, denial of danger vs. paralyzing panic, science vs. beliefs, us vs. the others, etc. This was the complex point of departure for the authors of this book to write down their thoughts, worries, informed guesses and well-argued hopes. Analyses, forecasts, as well as policy recommendations and warnings for the world's decision makers can be discovered in this work for a variety of readers to take profit.

WOLFGANG ISCHINGER

If this volume of essays demonstrates anything, it is the extraordinary breadth of experience and expertise of its many authors, along with sheer intellectual strength of our Alliance. As has so clearly been set out within these pages, the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting every aspect of our societies, including our political, diplomatic and security environment. Its impact will be profound and felt for years, even decades to come. This volume shows our collective determination not only to weather the storm, but to emerge stronger on the other side. We cannot predict the future, but we can certainly deal with the present. We can also ensure we are better prepared to respond to tomorrow's threats, whatever they may be. That is what we are doing at NATO.

MIRCEA GEOANĂ

 NEW
STRATEGY
CENTER

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