

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ROMANIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST – THE FATEFUL CENTURY 1918-2018 (II)

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Abstract. *In this article, we review several historical, geopolitical and diplomatic glosses as basic elements and inputs for a future ampler comparative inter-regional study on World War One/ World War I/ The Great War's profound and lasting consequences on two neighboring regions: Europe, with the case study of Romania, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In particular, the nexus of internal forces – external factors offer a unique and instructive approach for answering the question: "What the imprint and legacy of this chapter of global and regional history is?" Going through the major turning points of the hundred years 1918-2018 and looking at issues of particular interest in the tapestry of Romania-MENA countries' relations might shed light on the new "neighborhood" the two areas came to find themselves in at the end of this Century as a unique modernization period and at the gate of a new era of change. We argue that both Romania and the world of MENA already face/are challenged by the first turning point of a new common century.*

Keywords: *World War One/World War I/ The Great War, MENA, Turning Points, Neighborhood, Anniversaries, Diplomacy.*

PART II

1918-2018: The Middle East Region on the Radar of the Romanian Foreign Policy

Motto:

„By its native qualities, the Romanian people, justifying its Latin origin...managed to preserve its own entity all along History's vicissitudes”.

Izzet Choucri-bey, the First Head/Chargé d’Affaires of the Egyptian Diplomatic Representation in Romania, 1925¹

”For a good diplomat, Egypt represents a point of interest for us, regarding both Near East and Far East issues.”

Nicolae Titulescu, Foreign Minister of Romania, 1936²

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¹ *Dicționar diplomatic*, Editura Politică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1979, p. 992.

² Conatantin Botoran, *Relațiile Româno-Egiptene în Epoca Modernă și Contemporană [The Romanian-Egyptian Relations in the Modern Era]*, Editura Științifică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1974, pp. 85, 90.

“... a question for people that feel united. Israel is built from people who came from all over, so we understand very well how we have to build something in common, something that gives a possibility of being proud to be together. And I think that’s something that Romania achieved 100 years ago, by language, by culture, by history, that’s what unity means, and we are trying to do it too. We started years later, and it’s not always easy, but that’s the most important thing for our nation.”

Tamar Samash, The Israeli Ambassador to Romania, 2018³

On the backdrop of the dual paradigm which made Romania and The Middle East, what they are today – “the internal forces, popular and political, as the main driver leading to The Great Union Romania, similar to the external factors primarily behind the birth of The New Middle East” – pivotal consequences were to be recorded in the field of international relations and diplomacy, at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.

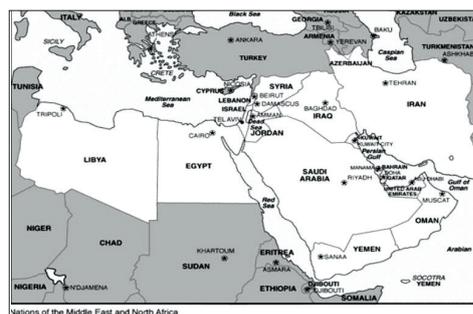
It was a new, *de jure* and *de facto*, geopolitical reality, in a region which, for the Romanians, kept and accentuated its qualification as a *neighborhood*, understood as such, in the design of the nation’s foreign policy, by the governments of the new Great Union Romania.

First, it was a consequence, conceptually and pragmatically, of the dynamics of the region’s geo-political landscape, from the rather amorphous and uncertain one existing in 1914 – Fig. 1/Map 1, to the more diversified and complicated regional one, which evolved in the following decades having as main actors the new nation-states, as they emerged from independence processes, mainly in the 1950s and 1960s – Fig. 2/Map 2⁴, a much more diversified and complicated space for diplomatic activity.

Fig. 1/Map 1



Fig. 2/Map 2



³ The Israeli Ambassador in Bucharest, Tamar Samash, Interview granted to AGERPRES.

<https://www.agerpres.ro/english/2018/04/25/diplomaticcentennial-israeli-ambassador-tamar-samash-on-president-government-rift-i-am-sorry-i-hope-that-it-will-settle-down-97255>.

⁴ Map 1 presents The Middle East circa 1914, with its three main components at the time: the Ottoman Empire, Persia and Arabia. Map 2 presents today’s Middle East and (part of) North Africa with almost two dozen of independent states, both maps being published on an Internet site under the aegis of the US Department of Defense.

A Multi-Stage Evolution

During this historic *Century*, the Romanian diplomatic journey in the Middle East went, in conceptual and practical terms, through several distinct tracts and “chapters”.

1. Almost two decades immediately following the conclusion of WWI

The periscope of the Romanian foreign policy was focused on the Middle East on those few areas with the potential of making possible the promotion of the new country’s interests, in political as well as economic terms.

That was mainly the case with the first independent Arab country – Egypt, in relation to which there existed, and still exist, a kind of unique comparative advantage impossible to underrate: the fairly direct and short maritime connection between the biggest sea ports of the two countries, for Romania – Constanta, at the Black Sea, for Egypt – Alexandria, on the southern shore of *Mare Nostrum*. An invaluable waterway which in time helped develop economic and commercial *umbilical cords* between the two nations: wood and cereals, plus, for a while, oil and oil byproducts, all from Romania to Egypt, cotton and even vegetables, from Egypt to Romania.

Meantime, Egypt had represented for the Romanian trade circles “*a starting point and a gate for the expansion of economic relations with other areas from the region*”,⁵ including Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, as “mandates” of the big European powers. A Romanian-Palestinian trade agreement was initiated in 1933, a Romanian-Syrian-Lebanese agreement was concluded in 1937, concomitantly with opening bilateral/ mixed chambers of commerce.

Beyond the economic dimension of foreign policy, of crucial importance, in particular during the 1930s, was the fact that in spite of their specific situations, Romania and Egypt had adopted “*convergent attitudes with regard to a number of international problems related to maintaining the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the states confronted with the danger of the fascists powers’ expansionist policy, hence the important tasks entrusted to the Romanian mission (Legatie) in Cairo, Romania’s only diplomatic representation in the Middle East.*”⁶

Worth mentioning is also the continuation of the contacts between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church, the relations between them being century-old, including through printing in Romania of valuable religious books, for liturgical and education purposes. Notably, in May 1928, Miron Cristea, the first Romanian Patriarch and President of the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, visited Egypt.

Even if the State of Israel will be established just there years after WWII, the period between the two world wars witnessed critical evolutions, in a sense essential “roots” for the future relations with Romania: between 1919 and 1948,

⁵ Constantin Botoran, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 89-90.

not less than 41,000 Jews from Romania emigrated to “*Eretz Israel*”, representing 10 percent from all Aliyah, i.e. the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the Land of Israel in the respective period.⁷

2. *Four and a half decades after the Second World War*

Against the backdrop of the dramatic developments in the Middle East in terms of nation-building, achieving state independence, peacefully or by war (Algeria), national resources nationalizations and other sovereign undertakings etc., Romania expanded, diversified and deepened her relationships with countries from that region.

It was a Governmental foreign affairs direction in accordance with the policy of the ruling regime at the time, but also, beyond any ideological issues, the sectorial implementation of an original and generous principle: “*Romania – Survival and affirmation through diplomacy during Cold War years.*”⁸

The period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s witnessed an upsurge in trade and economic cooperation between Romania and Middle East countries, seemingly to their mutual benefit. A marked characteristic, unknown before, and not repeated later, was the significant number of technical projects built by Romania in Arab countries: oil refineries, cement and fertilizer (phosphates) plants, chemical and petro-chemical units, seaports construction works, electricity lines, tractor assembly lines, land reclamation and irrigation works, hydrocarbon resource exploration, housing and office construction, roads and railways etc., with thousands of Romanian technicians and engineers working on each site. Intimately linked to all these was the strategic objective of ensuring raw materials necessary for the Romanian industries.⁹

In parallel, thousands of young Arabs were enrolled in and graduated from Romanian universities, mainly as beneficiaries of scholarships granted by the Romanian state. Also, Romanian teachers, up to several hundred, worked, for a number of years in education institutions like those of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia. One can say that Romania was an important contributor “*to the formation of human capital in a series Arab countries*”.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Romanian diplomacy was credited for its efforts, at the highest level, in aiming at reaching a “*just, comprehensive and durable solution*” for the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the Palestinian issue as its core dimension. The Romanians

⁷ Angel Tilvar, *Romania – Israel, Relatii in perioada comunista [Romania – Israel, Relations during the communist period]*, Editura Hasefer, 2017, p. 217.

⁸ See in this regard *România – Supraviețuire și afirmare prin diplomatie în anii Războiului Rece [Romania – Survival and Affirmation through Diplomacy during the Cold War Years]*, Fundația Europeană Titulescu Publishing House, Bucharest, Vol. I, 2013...Vol. IX, 2018. <http://www.titulescu.eu/category/evenimente/lansari-de-carte/>.

⁹ Marcel Dinu, *Unele considerente referitoare la extinderea relațiilor României cu Statele din Africa, Asia, America Latină și Orientul Mijlociu în a doua jumătate a secolului XX [Some considerations on the development of Romania's relations with the states from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East in the second half of the 20th Century]*. <http://www.irsea.ro/Rela-355-ii-externe-secolul-XX/>.

¹⁰ Aurel Turbaceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

functioned not so much as “mediators/peace brokers” but as an acknowledged and trustworthy “channel of communication and dialogue” between the parties directly concerned, “a kind of super-informal communication network”, as narrated by a Romanian professional diplomat directly involved in the process, namely Mircea Malita.¹¹ Romania played an “instrumental role” in the process that led to effective concluding of the first peace treaty between Israel and an Arab state, namely “The Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty”, signed in Washington, D.C., United States, on 26 March 1979, following the 1978 “Camp David Accords”. It is worthwhile mentioning, as an expression of the trust which existed between the Romanian leaders and those of Israel and Egypt, that during the separate preparatory discussions held in Romania, Menahem Begin, the Prime Minister of Israel, felt the need to make a premonitory confession: “The first Arab leader who will meet with the head of the Israeli government and will go to Jerusalem will be killed by the Arabs.”¹² Anwar el-Sadat, the Egyptian president, was killed in Cairo, three years after his visit to Jerusalem and his speech in the Israeli Knesset/Parliament, and two years after signing the peace treaty with Israel.

Romania’s role had been made easier due to the fact that the new State of Israel had been recognized as such by Bucharest just days after its declaration of independence, on 14 May 1948, plus the fact that Romania had been the only country from the former socialist camp which did not break diplomatic ties with the State of Israel after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

It should be emphasized that, “an important asset of Romanian’s independent foreign policy and a factor of political credibility, appreciated as such by the Western Chanceries”, was the maintenance and development of concomitant relationships with Israel and the Arab world.¹³

Meanwhile, with regard to the relations with Israel, the Romanian authorities could not have been oblivious of the fact that, “Israel’s image of having strong influence in and on Washington has always been an important incentive for engaging with it.”¹⁴

It is also true that at the beginning of that period, those relations were faced with some asperities due to the particular positions of the two states with regard to the emigration to Israel of the Romanian citizens of Jewish origin, namely the insistence of the new Middle East state’s leadership on the so-called “families reunification”, particularly giving the new regional and international political and geopolitical context created for the “Jewish problem” in the WWII aftermaths. In October 1949, the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, in a meeting with the head of the Romanian diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv, expressed openly “his apprehension with regard to the fate of the Jews who wanted to come to Israel

¹¹ Mircea Malita, Dan Dungaciu, *Istoria prin ochii diplomatului* [History through the diplomat’s eyes], Editura RAO Publishing House, 2014, pp. 251-253.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 462.

¹³ Dumitru Chican, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁴ https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/274794/israels-new-diplomatic-horizon?utm_source=tabletmagazine&utm_campaign=40e1a2e156-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_11_13_03_34&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c308bf8edb-40e1a2e156-207566881.

but had not received the permission of the Romanian government. Israel cannot strengthen itself and further develop only with the Jews already existing on its territory. It needs the Jews still living abroad. (Consequently) The development of the relations between Israel and Romania depends on the economic exchanges and on the emigration of the Jews who would like to leave Romania. Please convey this to the Romanian government.”¹⁵ One cannot say that the “message” of Israel’s first Prime Minister had no echo in Bucharest: the Jewish emigration from Romania to Israel intensified, already a peak of 47,071 emigrants being reached in 1950¹⁶, as part of the 117,950 persons who made the “first wave of emigration” 1948-1952, the biggest one from all eight “waves” of the Romanian Aliyah (the 3rd one, 1961-1965, if only half of the 1st, was not less substantive – 63,549, especially by comparison with the other 6 “waves” (the 8th, 1990-1995, including less than three thousands Romanian Jews)¹⁷. As “insider” analysts would later say, the problems related to the Romanian Jews emigration to Israel will make *the major “content” of the Romanian Jewish community’s history, and of the bilateral relations too, during the entire period of the communist regime.*¹⁸ According to local Jewish census, there were nearly 25,000 Jews in Romania in 1977. By 1992, there were fewer than 9,000. (The last count in 2011 recorded 3,271 Romanian Jews).¹⁹

3. *The three decades after the Romanian Revolution of December 1989*

Understandably, the Romanian Revolution of December 1989 led to a change of paradigm in Romania’s foreign policy, the relationships with the neighboring region of the Middle East included. The Romanian transition which started then, a rather long and complex process, profoundly impacted on respective political contacts and economic exchanges, in their structural evolution, trends and dynamics.

The Arabs: The emergent political landscape and power play in Bucharest were attentively scrutinized by both the traditional post-Second World War partners from the Middle East, be they Arab countries, as well as Israel and Iran, but also by potential new partners from the region. For instance, the Gulf’s nations with more conservative political regimes, given the basic Islamic structure, who had been reluctant in the past to establish diplomatic accords with “a communist nation”, reversed their attitude after the December 1989 Revolution: Saudi Arabia, the regional political, economic and Islamic pivot, decided, in March 1995, to establish diplomatic relations with Romania; Qatar (the country with the highest GDP/person in the world) had already done the same thing in Oct. 1990, Bahrain, in March 1991.

¹⁵ Angel Tilvar, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

¹⁶ Florin C. Stan, *Relațiile bilaterale România-Israel (1948-1959) O cronologie [The Bilateral Relations Romania-Israel (1948-1959). A timeline]*, Institutul Diplomatic Roman, Caiete Diplomatice, Year II, 2014, no. 2, pp. 5, 21.

¹⁷ Angel Tilvar, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-256.

¹⁸ Liviu Rotman quoted by Angel Tilvar in *op. cit.*, p. 240.

¹⁹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-an-american-moses-helped-lead-romanians-jews-to-the-promised-land/>.

Meanwhile, the privatization process of Romanian state economic assets, starting with the big industrial plants, made it practically impossible to consider new technical large-scale cooperation projects, like those of a quarter of a century before, radically changing the composition of Romanian commercial exchanges with MENA countries.

A striking example was the “disappearance” from Romanian exports of tractors and parts, mainly the U-650 type, greatly appreciated for their resilience by the Egyptians *Fellahs*, a solid “umbilical cord” in the Romanian-Egyptian relationship. Meanwhile, more cereals, plus wood (logs and timber), live animals were now exported by Romania to nations from the Gulf region to North Africa (in 2016, from the total exports of 4,7 mil. tons of Romanian wheat, 1,3 mil. tons were bought by Egypt, 0,8 mil. tons by Jordan and so on; from the overall Romanian exports of barley, of 2 mil tons, 0,87 mil. tons went to Saudi Arabia, 0,3 mil. tons to Jordan and so on, barley being an essential fodder for the region’s camels, sheep and goats).²⁰

And where big multinationals were present both in Romania and Middle East countries, such as those from the auto sector, cement or other kinds of industrial products, it seemed normal that the decision regarding where to exporting a part of the production would be taken, not necessarily at the level of the local factory, but at the mother-company headquarters, in accordance with their specific regional & global interests and strategies (as an example, when the hundreds of old Romanian Dacia cars became, more than a decade ago, too obsolete to continue to operate as taxis in Cairo, their “natural” replacement with the brand new Dacia Logan wasn’t “automatic”: the “parent” Renault/Paris had to decide if the Logans were to come to Egypt from the factory in Colibași/Romania, or the one in Casablanca/Morocco).

Meanwhile, a more intense diversification of Romania’s economic exchanges with MENA countries was determined by a brand-new evolution: the increased number, to hundreds, maybe thousands, of Arab and Israeli businesses operating in Romania, whether through direct or indirect investment.

Arab businessmen could be found in important sectors of the Romanian economy: trade, wholesale and retail, with diverse products, including vegetables, the real estate, tourism, hotels, medical sector, pharmaceutical products distribution, farming business (in southeast Romania, Lebanese companies investing in agri-business after the Romanian Revolution; one firm working more than 20,000 hectares, taking advantage of the highly fertile soil, growing grains – wheat, maize, as well as rapeseed, barley, sunflower and alfalfa – using modern production systems and benefiting from the system of EU agricultural subsidies, the products being intended mainly for export to countries such as Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, given the advantage of a land situated in proximity of the Danube, a transport route towards the maritime port of Constanta).

²⁰ Romania is strengthening its position as a grain producer and as a leading exporter among EU member states for wheat and corn. Romania exports the large majority of wheat outside the European Union, mainly to North Africa and Middle East. USDA GAIN Report Number RO1708 4/25/2017.

https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Romanian%20wheat%20exports%20are%20flourishing_Bucharest_Romania_4-25-2017.pdf.

Generally, Lebanese business people used to top the ranking of the Arab investors in Romania, being also an important bridge for directing other Arab investments, especially from the Gulf region, towards Romania. The large extent of desert in many Arab countries, resulting in their annual importation of more than 50-60 percent of the agricultural and food products needed for internal consumption, has recently stimulated direct interest by other Arab states, for instance Saudi and the Emirates, to invest in the Romanian agribusiness sector, specializing in essential human food commodities and the cultivation, production and trading of animal feed.²¹

In a sense, ever since the end of WWI, Romania has been a consistent source of...water to the Middle East, through exporting cereals, whose cultivation requires so much...water²². Not much different is the case of wood/ timber to the same area.

The landscape of the Romanian-Arab relationships was extended, after the December 1989 Revolution, with a substantial and dynamic new dimension – hundreds of mixed families, mainly in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, a human bridge with distinct potential for enriching overall links and contacts. The deterioration of the internal situation, including civil war, in Iraq and Syria, obliged some of those families to relocate, at least temporarily, to Romania, if not as a preferred residence then for business reasons.

Israel: By 2008, according to the Israeli ambassador to Romania at the time, “many Israeli companies chose Romania as a destination for their activities or as a hub to develop their businesses throughout the region. He counted hi-tech and communications, water management, cable structures, satellite services, hotel, real estate, banking, insurance, textile and food industries as business sectors with Israeli presence and investments in Romania.”²³ Notably, according to media reports, the Israeli entrepreneurs have become interested in Romanian real estate businesses: shopping malls, office buildings and residential projects, and also in military cooperation, with the renowned Elbit Systems company owning and operating in Romania a number of units producing armament components.²⁴

In the view of the Israeli ambassador to Romania, “we have such a potential of cooperation in the field of economy, water, agriculture, energy, (but) the results are not what they should be”²⁵, with other concrete domains like *the cyber-defense*,

²¹ <http://gulfnnews.com/business/sectors/investment/uae-saudi-firms-to-invest-1-3b-in-agriculture-1.2104297>.

²² “To produce 1kg of wheat requires between 500 and 4,000 liters of water”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/jan/10/how-much-water-food-production-waste>.

²³ <http://m.hotnews.ro/stire/3046975>.

²⁴ Elbit Systems has been operating in Romania for more than 25 years and is a traditional supplier of the Ministry of National Defense, having a close collaboration with other local defense companies. It carried out ample programs devoted to Romanian land forces (LAROM, Pirahna), modernizing combat aircraft (MIG-21 Lancer, PUMA-Socat, IAR-99 șoim, EW-C130), providing solutions for the naval forces (Puma-Naval and naval simulators). In November 2018, Elbit inaugurated its fourth unit in Romania, for the production and integration of terrestrial defense systems. It will function as a production and integration center for the turrets and battle stations contracted by Elbit Systems within local programs, but also as a regional hub designed to cover the demand for such systems for other countries. It intends to use in the new unit the experience gained at the global level both to intensify the transfer of technology to Romania and to increase the employee base and the export potential of the Romanian industry defense.

²⁵ The Israeli Ambassador in Bucharest, Tamar Samash, Interview with AGERPRES, 25 April 2018.

health, tourism. In 2014, Israel and Romania signed an agreement regarding the Romanian workers that work in Israel. “Romanian workers are considered to be very good professionals, and as they are very good professionals, they are demanded, they are wanted in other places too, and I understand that for Romanians it is easier to go and work in European countries rather than in Israel, so there aren’t that many workers that are coming to Israel now... We have shortage of housing in Israel, and Romanian builders, workers, are quite demanded.”²⁶

As for overall bilateral Romanian-Israeli relations, there is no doubt that a relevant role has been played by Israeli citizens of Romanian origin, including those born in Romania who emigrated to Israel (generally, now older people, up to 70,000), plus those born in Israel to families with roots in Romania (up to 130,000).²⁷ In 2005, the Israeli PM at the time, when receiving the Romanian PM, appreciated that in his country there existed “450,000 Israelis of Romanian extraction”²⁸. Just to recall that the origin of the national anthem of Israel *HATIKVA* / “Our Hope” is the Romanian folk song “*Cucuruz cu frunza-n sus*” (“Maize with standing leaf”), which was arranged by Samuel Cohen, an immigrant from the Romanian region of Bessarabia.

Pivotal factors impacting on Romania’s diplomacy with MENA 2004 – Romania acceding to NATO membership

“The dowry’ of Romania’s good relationships with the developing countries, the Arab ones included, accumulated as a result of a lot of hard work, during many years of sustainable efforts”²⁹, provided a specific asset when NATO received Romania as a new member, in 2004. In the sense that MENA countries with which Romania had developed traditional relations could be also found as participants to the two formats of NATO cooperation with the region:

(i). *The Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)*, born in 1994 and counting initially five-member states (Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Israel); it grew with the inclusion first of Jordan and later Algeria, and served as an important platform for the Alliance’s other outreach efforts, which received further input in 2004.

(ii). While the MD was elevated to the status of partnership, a separate program was developed for the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – *The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)*, for which NATO’s invitation has been accepted by Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with an official response from Saudi Arabia and Oman. “Both frameworks are decidedly more ambitious than the original dialogue and aim not only for political but also military cooperation and interoperability. In addition, the Alliance initiated its first training mission in Iraq.”³⁰ A small endeavor of 150 people contributed to the formation of the new Iraqi security forces’ officer corps.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st02_08x&CYear=2014.

²⁸ <http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Events/Pages/eventroma160305.aspx>.

²⁹ Marcel Dinu, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Florence Gaub, *Against All Odds: Relations between NATO and the MENA Region*, The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI)/ The U.S. Army War College, August 2012.

<http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/pub1112.pdf>.

Initial contact was also established with the League of Arab States. By the time the Arab Spring began, NATO had established relations with half of the League's member states. Major reasons for further deepen NATO-MENA countries dialogue and cooperation: "(i). *Geographic proximity is not a matter of choice: Syria and Iraq both border on a NATO country; it is no more than 468 miles from Algiers to Marseille, 375 miles from Rome to Tunis, and 477 miles from Ankara to Damascus;* (ii). *The region boasts 65.4 percent of the world's oil reserves and is one of the most important trade routes linking the Western to the Eastern Hemisphere. Not only oil but also goods from Asia find their way to Europe along this route – one that is quite vulnerable, since it harbors seven bottlenecks between the Strait of Hormuz and Gibraltar, making it very easy to shut the whole route down, as Egypt did in 1967.* (iii). *Political turmoil in the form of wars (both civil and interstate), coups d'état, insurgencies, failed states shook the region to the core in the last century, accelerating transformation and resulting in an unstable construct that is of strategic concern to NATO, in addition to the terrorism spilling over from this region into NATO Members.* (iv). *Allies are concerned about the proliferation of WMDs in the region. All of this is taking place in NATO's immediate neighborhood, along its southern flank. The Alliance thus has more strategic interest in this region than in any other – as recognized by the Americans in particular, though they are geographically far removed from it. In other words, the Southern Front is now the Central Front of the Alliance's strategic interest.*"³¹

Romania's EU membership, as from January 2007

The definitive and structural confirmation, institutionally and politically, of Romania's European identity, EU membership, from January 2007 (re)forged once more the country's foreign policy, inducing a kind of "division of labor" in its overall conceptualization and implementation.

All that with a particular "application" regarding the Middle East, an area of special interest for the EU too, in general, and for some of its major actors – France, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Germany, markedly: "*The EU has important strategic interests in MENA – energy security, political stability enabling access to markets and limiting fallout from region's crises – but has shied away from playing the political role commensurate with those interests or with its economic weight... A complicating factor is the absence of a unified European foreign policy. Member states pursue their individual interests in MENA, and in doing so often work at cross-purposes...The U.S.' receding interest in shaping events in Syria and the Middle East generally provides an opportunity for the EU to step in and play a role it has resisted playing..., credentials of relative impartiality & economic power to shape developments...The EU can now turn its relative political absence from MENA into an asset*".³²

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² International Crisis Group, *op. cit.*, pp. 29, 38-39.

As for Romania *per se*, the *diplomatic capital*, in terms in concrete expertise, accumulated along the previous decades of close relations with MENA's countries, proved a real asset in promoting the country's interests in the new collective institutional setting. This doesn't mean that the new stage in Romania's foreign affairs hasn't been less challenging, starting with the need to change and adapt the juridical framework of the bilateral relations. Also, efforts have been requested from Romania to contribute to the elaboration of common positions on the main issues of the EU agenda, where MENA region is permanently a priority – bilaterally and as a whole, for instance within the *European Neighborhood Policy – Southern/Mediterranean Dimension*.

Romania's *sustainable and trusted European profile* couldn't but deliver political and diplomatic *dividends*: on the occasion of his visit to Romania, in 2009, the Jordanian King highlighted "*the significant place of Romania as connecting factor between his country and the EU*".³³

Such a *new dual pattern in Romanian diplomacy towards the Middle East* seems inspirational for the academia circles too, a concrete and laudable testimony being the publication "*Romanian – Moroccan Forms of Manifestation in the European Space*", Coordinator: Dr. Viorella Manolache³⁴, underlining from the very beginning that, "*Romania and Morocco maintain a common place of contacts and periodical-institutional meetings, specific for political-diplomatic relationships situated within traditional lines and continuously confirming their given title of best connections*".³⁵ Hopefully, the outstanding researchers' ideas and conclusions expressed on this occasion, including shedding light on the additional opportunities offered by the French language and culture as a common denominator for both countries, would be found as useful ingredients in the process of preparing diplomatic decisions and actions on the ground.

They would be added to *the consistency of the principled Romanian foreign policy and its commitments in practical terms regarding the territorial unity and integrity, sovereignty and independence of MENA region's countries faced with fragmentation and disintegration threats, as well as the need to having political and inclusive solutions to internal crises*. The same *principle of the political solution* has been promoted with respect to *the conflict situations in the region*, in order to ensure peace and stability, and to fighting against terrorist groups, based on a comprehensive approach, one that should consider the socio-economic and political causes that lead to radicalization and the emergence of terrorist groups.³⁶

A case in point is *Syria*: "*We support the unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Syrian state, as well as the fact that the only alternative which is not susceptible to generate a power vacuum in Syria is the political and inclusive solution*".³⁷ A position which has been widely shared in international

³³ Aurel Turbaceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³⁴ Editura Institutului de Stiinte Politice si Relatii Internationale Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014.

³⁵ Viorella Manolache, *Argument, op. cit.*, p. 9.

³⁶ <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/44968>.

³⁷ *Cum a făcut Meleşcanu istorie. O călătorie în politica externă a României cu și despre diplomatul Teodor Meleşcanu*, *Q Magazine*, No. 216, March 2018, p. 27. [Interview with the minister of Foreign Affairs Teodor Meleşcanu, *Q Magazine*, March 2018, p. 27]. <http://www.mae.ro/node/45240>, <https://www.qmagazine.ro/teodor-melescanu-pentru-q-magazine-ne-dorim-relatii-pragmatice-si-predictibile-cu-rusia/>.

political, academia and media circles: *“The tragic lesson of Syria is that military successes do not result in peace but rather prompt the victors to wage yet more war.”*³⁸

It was also in relation to the Syrian civil war that Romanian foreign policy came with innovative approaches, namely the decision already taken in 2011, in view of the size of the Romanian community in Syria, to maintain the Romanian Embassy in Damascus, which has been, since then, the only EU representation in the Syrian capital delivering the entire range of consular services. Acknowledging the capacity of the Romanian Foreign Ministry in the management of consular crises, several countries (France, Portugal, Canada, Australia, Republic of Moldova) entrusted to Romania consular protection and assistance for their own citizens in Syria. More, *“Romania, was designated, at the EU level, to coordinate the implementation of the common plans regarding the management of the crises in the Syrian space, strengthening as such Romania’s profile as a provider of consular assistance to the benefit of the EU citizens.”*³⁹

A package of sensitive issues

MENA remains that region of the world which has been *par excellence* a major source for political, strategic and geo-political sensitive issues, of direct impact and interest to the regional parties, as well as outside actors, EU included.

To think about the almost frozen Israeli-Arab/ Palestinian peace process, with its quartet of pending issues: Jerusalem, Borders, Israeli security, Palestinian refugees, plus Gaza, in addition to *civil wars* in both Syria and Yemen, migrants from the Middle East and so on. Generally, the complexity and many intricacies of the present political and geo-political MENA landscape includes quite a lot of flashpoints for national and regional diplomatic concerns. And that doesn’t make Romania less involved or less prepared: *“We will intensify our diplomatic action in the Middle East, where decisive steps are necessary to solve the conflictual files which are affecting the international peace and security. The Peace Process in the Middle East must benefit from a re-launching of the direct negotiations, so that it reaches a lasting and comprehensive solution that in the end would allow the two states, Israel and Palestine, to live peacefully together. The Syrian and Libyan files also need tangible progress.”*⁴⁰

Easier said than done and in enough concrete cases and that even for the tested “Romanian diplomacy expertise” on Middle East questions:

³⁸ *After the fall of Eastern Ghouta, the Syrian civil war has graduated to a new phase*, in *The National*, March 25, 2018. <https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/editorial/after-the-fall-of-eastern-ghouta-the-syrian-civil-war-has-graduated-to-a-new-phase-1.716034>.

“For America’s generals, more than 17 years of combat in MENA countries have served as a lesson in the limits of overwhelming force to end wars fueled by sectarian feuds, unreliable allies and persistent government corruption.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/for-trump-and-his-generals-victory-has-different-meanings/2018/04/05/8d74eab0-381d-11e8-9c0a->

³⁹ Interview with the Romanian Foreign Minister.

⁴⁰ <http://www.presidency.ro/en/media/speeches/address-by-the-president-of-romania-on-the-occasion-of-the-annual-meeting-with-the-heads-of-diplomatic-missions-accredited-to-bucharest1519643810>.

(i). Incontestably, Jerusalem still remains the knottiest issue on the Middle East agenda, be it projected from Washington, Brussels, Moscow or Bucharest. The critical aspect from the EU point of view was presented by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker in his speech at the 2018 Munich Security Conference: discussing the difficulties encountered by the EU in reaching a “unified position” on issues like *Jerusalem*, Juncker drew the attention to “need to simplify these decision-making processes so that the European Union can also reach positions by qualified-majority voting... We need more power in common defense, foreign and security policy matters. Of course, we first need to put our own house in order in many respects.”⁴¹

That is all the more necessary against the backdrop of a continuation of *the perfect storm* in the Middle East, far from lessening at the date of the speech (February 2018). With Jerusalem’s unenviable perpetual posture “*in the eye of the storm*”. The U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision, at the end of 2017, to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was considered by the EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini as having “a very worrying potential impact... It is a very fragile context and the announcement has the potential to send us backwards to even darker times than the ones we are already living in... I’ve made clear our disagreement with this decision... this stance was backed by all the foreign ministers of the 28 member states of the European Union. We believe that the only realistic solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is based on two states and with Jerusalem as the capital of both the state of Israel and the state of Palestine... We believe this difficult moment called for an even stronger engagement for peace.” However, Mogherini acknowledged that Trump made clear “that the status quo of the holy city must be preserved... the worst thing that could happen now is an escalation of tensions around the holy places and in the region, because what happens in Jerusalem matters to the whole region and the entire world.”⁴²

German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced at the time that her government “does not agree” with Trump’s decision and “will stand by existing U.N. resolutions on the topic, which make clear that the status of Jerusalem must be negotiated as part of negotiations on a two-state solution [for Israel], and that is why we want this process to be revived... (anyway) Europe can’t find solutions for the region alone, and that the U.S. must be involved”.⁴³

(ii). Almost five years into the earth-shattering post-“Arab Spring” evolutions, a strong shockwave was propagated in the direction of Europe, strongly felt equally by the EU institutions and member-states”: *the flow of migrants/ influx of refugees flooding the Continent, mainly in 2015 and 2016, through its southern borders being mainly from the Arab countries faced with civil wars and other forms of violence*⁴⁴, as if MENA had finally found the suitable time and necessary

⁴¹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-18-841_en.htm.

⁴² *Politico*, 12/7/17, <https://www.politico.eu/article/federica-mogherini-donald-trump-jerusalem-decision-very-worrying/>.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ “The (main) reason for the surge in emigration to Europe was that the Syrian civil war had dragged on for years, and many of those who had thought of the camps as a temporary refuge simply gave up hope for ever

means for “paying”, at least in part, the over-due debts to its century-old midwife. The result: EU looked for a while almost fractured in its foundations, among them the principle of solidarity, the principle of voluntarism and the measures for burden sharing.

A principled foreign policy promoter and practitioner, Romania was meantime careful on the internal conditions related both to national security concerns and the difficulties of integrating Middle East migrants given, among other things, the existing level of preparedness of Romanian society in dealing with migrants and the limited financial resources.⁴⁵ Eventually, into the picture came, easing the matter, the attitude of the migrants themselves, who saw in Romania not so much *a country of destination*, but rather *a country of transit* towards richer Western Europe, hence the developing of the Black Sea route, in parallel with the Mediterranean one. Plus the fact that, “*the migrants who took this route on the Black Sea must have experienced a very hard journey*”, due to the water and weather conditions, as *test runs for smugglers too*”.⁴⁶

Is Romania preparing herself for that new wave of migrants? From some public reports, we can understand that the Romanian authorities are not only aware of that potential evolution, but it is taking some qualitatively new measures, namely adjustments to the national strategy in this field, aiming at integrating such migrants into the Romanian work force, given the increasing national deficit in this regard. A laudable objective conditional on legislative and institutional decisions.⁴⁷

A Perspective

On the short, medium and long term, there will be several relevant opportunities, and challenges too, for Romanian foreign policy and diplomacy to further contribute to EU relations with MENA countries, generally to expand the relationships with MENA region and contribute to solving its critical problems.

First, the Romanian rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, between 1 January and 30 June 2019, has come against a very peculiar background from this point of view: “*There is clearly a lack of strategic agreement in Europe on the MENA region. The EU Global Strategy Mogherini put forward last year provides a framework, but it will not make the EU’s Middle East policy*

returning to their homes. Others left to escape deepening poverty or the inability to obtain work permits in the countries where they had sought refuge. Still others left because of the lack of educational opportunities for themselves or their children, or because aid shortfalls made their lives in the camps unbearable.” James L. Gelvin, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁴⁵ Speaking to EURONEWS, a representative of the Immigration Office, put the total capacity of Romania’s six asylum centers at around 1,330, with the possibility of adding additional bed facilities.

<http://www.euronews.com/2017/09/16/is-romania-ready-to-deal-with-its-rising-migrant-numbers>.

⁴⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/sep/12/smugglers-make-test-runs-with-migrants-across-even-more-deadly-black-sea-route-romania>.

⁴⁷ *Strategie. România se pregătește să convertească noul val de refugiați în forța de muncă lipsă de care se plâng angajatorii* [Strategy. Romania is preparing to transform the new wave of refugee in the working force whose absence now makes crying the hiring businessmen], *Adevarul*, 23 April 2018. adevarul.ro/p7ndmy.

more coherent. Germany's sensitivity to the refugee crisis and now to migration issues, and the priority France gives to fighting terrorism, offers an opportunity to propose a broader *quid pro quo*, and a more comprehensive strategy, as the two phenomena are only different aspects of the same crisis, in both Syria and Libya. This can then be expanded to other key partners. More generally, the need to step up to the plate collectively (including with the UK) if Europe wants to have a say in the management of the crisis in Syria could also act as a catalyst. The necessity to develop its own autonomous strategy in the context of the Trump administration's policy on Iran, or the MEPP, should also help in this regard."⁴⁸

More, with regard to a particular EU major actor: "The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region holds a special place not only in France's foreign policy, but also in its society, politics, history, and culture. (Particularly) The Middle East is a key stage for France's foreign policy, one where it bids to prove its credentials as an international power, punching above its weight and demonstrating the independence that is so important to the French sense of place in the world...."⁴⁹

On the other hand, the "EU-US foreign policy coordination on third-country and regional situations is an essential part of transatlantic efforts to shape the global political environment – for instance, the coordination of US and EU sanctions policies against third countries such as Iran, has played an increasing role in EU-US foreign policy – however, there are areas of potential divergence, particularly around Iran and its nuclear deal, which could lead to major rifts between the EU and the US".⁵⁰ All that against the backdrop of Romania having the US as her most important strategic partner.

Second, Romania aspires to get a new mandate as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, for 2020-2021, with the election by the General Assembly in the second half of 2019. From the experience of Romania's previous mandate, 2004-2005, we know how relevant, in terms of number and political weight, are the MENA's issues on the Security Council agenda, and the fact that many of them ask for rapid positions and concrete action, whatever "games" are played by the major actors, i.e. the Council's permanent members.

In the context, it is to be remembered that during that previous mandate, Romania managed to introduce and have approved, in unanimity, by the Security Council its first ever resolution since participating in this critical UN body: *Resolution 1631* (2005), adopted by the Security Council at its 5282nd meeting, on 17 October 2005, *expressing the UN Security Council determination to take appropriate steps*

⁴⁸ Manuel Lafont Rapnouil, *Alone in the desert? How France can lead Europe in the Middle East*, in *European Council on Foreign Affairs ECFA, Policy Brief*, 10th April, 2018.

http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/alone_in_the_desert_how_france_can_lead_europe_in_the_middle_east.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *The Future of the United States and Europe. An Irreplaceable Partnership*, Chatham House, Research Paper, April 2018.

https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/future-united-states-and-europe-irreplaceable-partnership?utm_source=Chatham%20House&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=9363632_Publication%20Aler.

to the further development of cooperation between the United Nations and regional and sub-regional organizations in maintaining international peace and security, consistent with Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. A resolution with undeniable direct and indirect impact on the Middle East evolutions and which could be productively developed in the new regional and international context.

A Romanian-MENA diplomatic spring?

In line with the Romanian Government's Programme for 2017-2020, which provides for intensifying political and diplomatic efforts in this direction, at the official opening of the 2017 Annual Meeting of the Romanian Diplomacy, the minister of foreign affairs highlighted that *"We need to deepen our strategic relationship with Israel by expanding our areas of cooperation while enhancing our relations with the Middle East region as a whole"*⁵¹. Furthermore, on the occasion the 2018 edition of the Annual Reunion of Romanian Diplomacy (ARRD), with the topic *"Diplomacy – A Pillar of Centennial Romania"*, the head of the Romanian diplomacy further underlined that, *"For Romania's security and economic interests, but also in the spirit of a global Romania, as a responsible and reputable member of the UN, new energies will need to be deployed in our traditional relations with states in the Middle East and North Africa. This is an area of heightened interest, with multiple economic, cultural, inter-human valences, and especially important in terms of regional and global security. Romania will continue to enhance its strategically oriented relationship with Israel, by expanding the areas of cooperation, while at the same time building up our relations with all the countries in the region. Political, commercial, and investment ties with the Gulf states will also be consolidated. Romania will continue to be involved in the processes for solutions to the Middle East crises, based on respect for international law and the specific UN resolutions. Our diplomacy will continue to support the identification of a durable solution in the Middle East Peace Process. Romania will also actively support the efforts for a political settlement in the Syrian file. Last but not least, we will continue to support international counter-terrorism efforts, among others as a participant in the Global Coalition against ISIL/Daesh."*⁵²

Against this backdrop, several interesting developments were recorded, in practical terms, "on the ground", for the respective area of Romania's foreign policy, enticing the open question if this could presage a *"Romanian – Arab – Israeli diplomatic spring"*.

Romania and the Arabs

1. *The official visits (April 2018) to the North-African area of MENA – Algeria, Libya and Tunisia – by the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor*

⁵¹ <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/42962>.

⁵² <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/46797>.

Meleşcanu represented the first such endeavor by the Romanian diplomacy after a long time, seemingly nurtured by a dual symbiotic approach. First, the head of the Romanian diplomacy pointed out that the impetus for the political dialogue and the extension of the cooperation with the countries outside the European Union, including *re-launching the bilateral relations of Romania with traditional partners in the Middle East*, represents an important objective included in the Government Program 2017-2020.⁵³ Second, Romania's desire to intensify economic diplomacy activities in support of the very good political dialogue, in parallel with Romania's support for those nations' relations with the EU. All that with specific nuances related to the host country (as presented in the press statements by the Romanian foreign ministry).

2. *The first session of the Joint Cooperation Committee between the Romanian Government and the Government of the United Arab Emirates* (Bucharest, April 16-17, 2018), a reflection of a drive to recalibrating Romanian diplomacy's orientation towards traditional Gulf partners, hence the common interest in deepening cooperation in fields such as: agriculture, transports, infrastructure, energy, IT and cyber security, as well as education and culture, as well as intensifying the direct contacts between the two countries' business sectors.⁵⁴

3. In September 2018, Morocco's Foreign Minister visited Bucharest, an opportunity to underline that his country "*considers Romania as a strategic partner, hence the importance of diversifying Romania-Morocco bilateral relationships, both in the economic area and in other sectors of interest.*"⁵⁵

4. Participating to the *EU – Arab World Summit "Shared Horizons"*, which took place in Athens at the end of October 2018, offered to the Romanian Foreign Minister the opportunity for a global approach with regard to the European-Mediterranean cooperation, in addition to expressing "*Romania's support for the initiatives of regional cooperation EU-Southern Neighbourhood which could have an added value with regard to the energy security, as well as the inter-connectivity of the transportation networks and corridors.*"⁵⁶

5. *A distinct objective of Romanian foreign policy undertaken through the Programme for Government 2017-2020 is represented by the pragmatic interaction with the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).* In this regard, a complex diplomatic narrative, corroborating the two essential dimensions – political dialogue and economic cooperation, unfolded on the occasion of the Prime Minister of Romania, Mrs. Viorica Dancila' official visits to four of the six GCC countries: the United Arab Emirates (October 18, 2018), Kuwait (October 19-21, 2018), Oman (3-5 November, 2018), and Qatar (November 6-8, 2018). Notably, the Head of the Romanian Executive presented the important investment opportunities offered by Romania, associated with know-how in areas such as agriculture, tourism, transport, education, health, research and innovation, all that against the backdrop

⁵³ <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/45584>.

⁵⁴ <http://gov.ro/en/news/prime-minister-viorica-dancila-met-with-the-uae-minister-of-state-for-foreign-affairs&page=2>.

⁵⁵ <http://www.mae.ro/node/46871>.

⁵⁶ <http://www.mae.ro/node/47282>.

of the Romanian attractive business environment, improved by recent legislative changes, such as those in the law on public-private partnerships aimed at stimulating the private investments and the development of major projects of national importance. Expectedly, such steps could positively impact both the volume and the structure of Arab investments in the Romanian economy and other sectors of mutual interest.

In particular, the Romanian and Emirati Heads of Government adopted a “*Joint Statement on Establishing a Strategic Economic Partnership between the Government of Romania and the Government of the United Arab Emirates*”. The document mentions the objectives of bilateral cooperation in priority sectors to Romania, namely: trade, investment, industry, *agriculture*, banking, energy, transport and transport infrastructure, IT and blockchain technology, as well as education, culture, research innovation, tourism, youth and sports. The statement also highlighted the important role of the Romanian and Emirati communities in the UAE and Romania respectively, in the economic, social and cultural development of the two countries. The document emphasized the need to adopting an *action plan* in the near future establishing the concrete steps the two Governments will undertake to implement the strategic economic partnership.⁵⁷

Similarly, on the occasion of the official visit of the Romanian PM to the Qatar, three documents of bilateral cooperation were signed in the fields of *agriculture*, tourism, and cooperation between the Diplomatic Institutes of the two states.⁵⁸

The fact that, on the occasion of this first official tour by a Romanian PM to the Gulf, one sector in particular, namely *the agriculture*, was present in all discussions and documents signed, could keenly signal the region’s countries special interest, even a vital one, in the perspective: “*Ensuring an adequate and balanced food supply has never been easy for Gulf Arab nations, which are both extremely water-scarce and reliant on food imports. The situation will only get more difficult in the coming decades, as climate change threatens global agricultural production and energy demand shifts away from fossil fuels – the Gulf region’s primary export.*”⁵⁹

With the Romanian Prime Minister’s official visits to the four countries from the GCC⁶⁰, in the fall of 2018 was in particular notable for a potential emergence of a *Romanian-Arab “diplomatic spring*”. Hopefully to be extrapolated into

⁵⁷ <http://gov.ro/en/news/prime-minister-viorica-dancila-s-visit-to-the-united-arab-emirates1539789656&page=4>.

⁵⁸ <http://gov.ro/en/news/prime-minister-viorica-dancila-s-official-visit-to-the-state-of-qatar>.

⁵⁹ *The Challenge of Feeding Arab Gulf Countries in a Post-Fossil Fuel World*, “World Politics Review”, Nov. 8, 2018. https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/26701/the-challenge-of-feeding-arab-gulf-countries-in-a-post-fossil-fuel-world?utm_source=WPR+Free+Newsletter&utm_campaign=52f00b2846Daily_Free_11092018&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6e36cc98fd-52f00b2846-64191233&mc_cid=52f00b2846&mc_eid=af02dbbf96.

⁶⁰ The relation between Romania and a fifth country from the six GCC members, namely *Bahrain*, were also recently “covered” and that in the talks held in the Bahrain capital, at the end of October 2018, by the Secretary of State for Bilateral Global Affairs with the Romanian Foreign Ministry, Monica Gheorghită, who participated to the 14th edition of the “*Manama Dialogue*”. It was the first time Romania was represented at the respective international forum, among other relevant personalities attending to mention just the US Secretary of Defense. In the meetings and consultations with officials from the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Romanian

concrete political and economic terms during the spring *per se* of 2019, as part of the six month Romanian rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (January 1 – June 30, 2019), in light of the Bucharest commitment for intensifying efforts to promote peace and security in this region, as well as for maintaining a constant dialogue between EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as establishing a solid commercial bridge between them, including the identification of new concrete cooperation projects with benefits for both sides.⁶¹ Beyond the usual rhetoric semantic for such circumstances, it is no doubt that the Romanian side has had great hopes that the Gulf businessmen would need no much time for their decision to come with substantial investment in Romania, be it in public-private project, seemingly the preferred tool for moment by the Government in Bucharest, but, eventually, in any other format suitable for the capital providers.

As for longer term goals, along continuing diplomatic involvement, together with EU partners, in the search for peace and stabilization in the MENA region, it could prove worthwhile the participation of Romania, as government institutions and private companies, to the future reconstruction works in the Middle East. One can say that a first step in this regard was taken on the occasion of the *International Conference on Reconstruction and Development of the Republic of Iraq*, held in Kuwait, in the middle of February 2018. Both the EU representatives and the Romanian officials expressed the will to consolidate the achievements that the Iraqi people have managed to build, and help them “win the peace”, after they managed to win the war against Daesh, addressing the Iraqi people’s urgent needs, as a solid foundation for reconstruction. In concrete terms, it was expressed Romania’s willingness for participation in the post-conflict reconstruction process of the Republic of Iraq, both institutional and economic, transmitting the Romanian authorities’ interest in sharing the expertise accumulated by Romania in the political and economic transition processes.⁶²

An idea fully shared by voices from the region when debating the future reconstruction efforts not only in Iraq, but also in Syria, Yemen, Libya: “*The reconstruction should also not focus only on physical assets and infrastructure, but should also extend to building new institutions, economic, political and legal, in the light of the legacy of weakness or even the absence of suitable institutions in these three countries and in the wider region. This could turn out to be a major challenge in the reconstruction efforts, as it would require building institutions from scratch and avoiding as much as possible the restoration of pre-war institutional settings that were in large part a main cause of the conflicts themselves.*”⁶³

diplomat stated her Government’s interest to strengthening and developing the cooperation between the two countries, by re-launching the political dialogue and stepping up the political, economic and sectorial contacts, enlarging the bilateral juridical framework including. Here also, the perspective of attracting to Romania investment from Bahrain, a small Kingdom, but hydrocarbon rich, couldn’t be absent from the agenda of the talks. <http://www.mae.ro/node/47272>.

⁶¹ <http://gov.ro/en/news/prime-minister-viorica-dancila-s-official-visit-to-the-state-of-qatar>.

⁶² <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/44978>.

⁶³ Hussein Suleiman, *Costs of conflicts in the Middle East*, Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue 1383, 1-7 March 2018, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/23901.aspx>.

A comprehensive logic – “ending conflicts, post-conflict stabilization, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and post-conflict peacebuilding”, including outside serious policies and practical measures aimed at “economic growth and political inclusion”. In the absence of such efforts, there will maintained the “long-standing conditions of marginalization”⁶⁴ as basic source for youth radicalization in the region and a new drive for mobilization by terrorist organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Especially against the backdrop of the striking reality for practically all MENA countries, namely the “youth bulge which is threateningly increasing”.⁶⁵

EU foreign ministers, discussing the developments in Syria, on April 16, 2018, reiterated that “EU will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties in the conflict on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, is firmly under way. The EU continues to actively support the UN in its coordination of post-agreement civilian stabilization planning and will maintain its work with International Financial Institutions and other donors. Special responsibility for the costs of reconstruction should also be taken by those who have fuelled the conflict.”⁶⁶

Consequently, addressing the long-term issues of reconstruction in the Middle East will give opportunities for dialogue of cooperation between Romania and EU members and institutions, as well as with other strategic partners, like the United States, all that in addition to practically re-launching Romania’s relations with traditional partners from MENA region.

Romania and the State of Israel

Evolving under the auspicious moment of the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel’s establishment, associated with 70 years of uninterrupted diplomatic relations, the Romanian-Israeli relationships proved really eventful in 2018. Along (re) confirming an “unwritten rule” for these relations, namely paying visits to Israel by members of a new Romanian Government, the Prime-Minister included, it was mainly the agenda of the contacts and talks held that has had particularly drew the attention this time. To the “traditional” issues of expanding the political and political bilateral relations, comprising cooperation in high technologies, as well as in the military and security areas, a completely new subject was added, one by far more complicated than any others until now. A certain asymmetry in the two sides’ diplomatic goals transpired from their press statements on the meetings.

1. The official visit to Romania of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, Tzipi Hotovely, at the beginning of April, 2018:

⁶⁴ David Sterman, Nate Rosenblatt, *All Jihad is Local: Volume II ISIS in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula*, APRIL 5, 2018.

https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/policy-papers/all-jihad-local-volume-ii/?wpisrc=nl_todayworld&wpmm=1.

⁶⁵ Peter Sloterdijk, *Mănie și timp. Eseu politico-psiologic [Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation]*, ART Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014, p. 300.

⁶⁶ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/33736/syria-conclusions-7956_18.pdf.

- According to official Romanian statements, the visit revealed the two sides' interest in further capitalization of economic cooperation, increasing the number of concrete projects and stimulate mutual interest of business communities of the two countries for the economic potential of both Romania and Israel. With a special attention to collaboration opportunities at sectorial level, in fields such as: defense, healthcare, tourism and education, the possibility being explored for the possibility of concluding a partnership Romania – Israel in the field of new technologies, with emphasis on energy, sustainable agriculture, cyber security and entrepreneurial innovations for high-tech areas.⁶⁷

- According to Israel press reports and commentaries, the Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely visit to Bucharest was part of her diplomatic campaign to promote the transfer of foreign embassies to Jerusalem, in this context she would had said to the head of the Romanian diplomacy that, *“This is a historic window of opportunity following the move of the American Embassy to Jerusalem. It is time to choose to stand on the right side of history and be one of the pioneer countries to move their embassy to our capital, Jerusalem”*. The same sources said that, the Romanian Foreign Minister responded by saying that his country would assess the situation and positively consider the issue of moving its embassy to Jerusalem. Subsequent to the statement made later by the leader of Romania's ruling Social Democratic Party, Liviu Dragnea, that his country should “seriously consider” moving the Romanian embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, for practical reasons and following US President Donald Trump's decision to relocate the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, even that *“The decision has been taken... procedures [for the move] have started”*⁶⁸, Tzipi Hotovely wrote on her Twitter account: *“I congratulate the speaker of the Romanian parliament on his announcement today to the media according to which Romania will commence the process of moving the Romanian embassy to Jerusalem. This was the spirit of our meeting last week in Bucharest, and I hope to see the Romanian Embassy in Jerusalem soon.”*⁶⁹

2. The official visit paid to the State of Israel by the Prime-Minister of Romania, Viorica Dăncilă (25-26 April 2018)

(a). Talks with the Israeli Prime Minister/ 25/04/2018:

- The Government of Romania statement: *“Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă and her Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu mentioned the traditional friendship relations between the two countries and highlighted the excellent level of bilateral relations between Romania and the State of Israel, based on a 70-year tradition. The Romanian Prime Minister voiced satisfaction over the interest showed by Israel in the Romanian proposal regarding the conclusion of a Romania -Israel partnership in the field of new technologies, which will allow*

⁶⁷ <http://gov.ro/en/news/prime-minister-viorica-Dăncilă-received-deputy-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-state-of-israel-h-e-ms-tzipi-hotovely-at-victoria-palace&page=3>.

⁶⁸ A first Palestinian official reaction: “Such a step would constitute a violation of the rights of the Palestinians and would be contrary to international resolutions. The transfer of the Romanian embassy would further remove the chances for peace.”

⁶⁹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/romania-begins-process-for-possible-move-of-its-embassy-to-jerusalem/>.

the drawing up of joint projects in its main areas, namely: research, healthcare, telemedicine, high-tech entrepreneurial innovation, all of which will stimulate the mutual interest of the two countries' business communities. Aspects regarding co-operation in the military, strategic areas and in cyber security were also discussed in this context. The interest of both countries in holding the third joint high-level government meeting (G2G) in 2018 was highlighted, while underlining the necessity to organize some business contacts. During the talks, the two officials referred to the existing good co-operation in the multilateral collaboration format, including as regards the mutual support for candidacies.” Notably, “the Israeli Prime Minister hailed the adoption by Romanian Government of a framework launching the debate on relocating Romania’s Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.”⁷⁰

- Israel’s Prime Minister Office Press Release: *“The two Prime Ministers agreed to hold a G2G meeting in Romania in the coming months. They discussed bilateral issues, strengthening cooperation and the holding of joint projects in – inter alia – security, health, technology and cyber defense. Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed appreciation for the Romanian Government’s approval of a draft decision on initiating the transfer the transfer of the Romanian Embassy to Jerusalem and welcomed the statements of the president of the parliament in support of the move.”⁷¹*

(b). Meeting with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin/ 26 April 2018:

- The press release of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies sent to AGERPRES: *“Speaker Liviu Dragnea, Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă and Foreign Minister Teodor Meleșcanu had a meeting on Thursday with Israel’s President Reuven Rivlin, occasioned by the visit of the Romanian delegation to Israel. „Speaker of the Deputies’ Chamber stated that he endorses the proposal regarding the relocation of Romania’s Embassy to Jerusalem, considering the internal consultations. The decision was hailed by Israel’s President Reuven Rivlin. In this context, Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă conveyed to the Israeli side that the Government proposed the future ambassador of Romania to Israel, but the appointment decision rests with the president. The Romanian officials showed that one of our country’s priorities is strengthening the bilateral cooperation and reiterated the wish to make progresses towards the strategic dimension of the Romanian-Israeli relationship. During the talks, the important role of the Israeli community of Romanian ancestry in building the modern state of Israel, as well as in strengthening the relations between the two countries was highlighted“.⁷²*

- Israeli President’s Spokesperson: *“President Reuven Rivlin today (Thursday, 26 April 2018), met at his residence in Jerusalem with Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă who was making an official visit to Israel. The Prime Minister was joined by the President of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies Liviu Dragnea, and Foreign Minister Teodor Meleșcanu. The President began by thanking the*

⁷⁰ <http://gov.ro/en/news/prime-minister-viorica-Dăncilă-s-visit-to-the-state-of-israel>.

⁷¹ http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Events/Pages/event_romania250418.aspx.

⁷² <https://www.agerpres.ro/english/2018/04/26/proposal-on-relocating-romania-s-embassy-to-jerusalem-on-discussions-agenda-of-romania-s-delegation-with-israel-s-president-and-pm-98451>.

Prime Minister, the Romanian Government and Parliament, for their decision to relocate the Romanian Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. He said, "I would like to welcome the distinguished Prime Minister and the ministers who are with her on this visit, which takes place at a significant time after Romania's decision to transfer its embassy to Jerusalem." The President noted the warm ties between the two countries over the years and added, "It is wonderful to receive here in our capital, Jerusalem, leaders of a government that is promoting the close cooperation between our countries. This cooperation and partnership are not just between our governments, but between people." The President went on to hold a wide-ranging discussion with the Prime Minister on a number of key issues, including the Jewish community in Romania, and the work being done in the Romanian Parliament to promote the community's well-being. The President said, "I would like to thank you, Madam Prime Minister, for your great attention to the need to fight anti-Semitism, and for your concern for the Jewish community in Romania. The Romanian community in Israel has great influence in all the areas of life in the State of Israel in its 70 years of existence." Prime Minister Dăncilă thanked the President and said, "This is an important opportunity to meet with you. As I said we are here as friends, and with me is the President of the Chamber of Deputies, and the Foreign Minister, and we see great importance in the friendly relationship between Israel and Romania. It is true, there has been a decision taken by the Government to move the embassy to Jerusalem, and we are consulting in the issue with all the institutions in the country. The first step has been taken and it is important for us to implement the decision, but unfortunately we do not have support from all the parties as we would like." She added, "Yesterday we met with Prime Minister Netanyahu and we decided to hold a meeting between the two governments, to build as close a link as possible."⁷³

The important Israeli newspaper Jerusalem Post reported that, "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked his Romanian counterpart Viorica Dăncilă for her efforts to relocate her country's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem... In advance of her visit, Dăncilă announced that her country plans to follow US President Donald Trump's lead by relocating its embassy and submitted a proposal to do so to the cabinet. But approval will be needed from Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, who has opposed the move. To date, only Guatemala has committed to an embassy relocation. It plans to open its Jerusalem embassy on May 15, one day after the US embassy opens its doors in the country's capital. Honduras and the Czech Republic have also spoken of such a move, but no final decisions have been made. The international community has largely refrained from placing its embassies in West Jerusalem because it believes the status of the city should be determined through final status negotiations for a two state solution. The few countries that had embassies in Jerusalem closed them in 1980 to protest the Knesset's passage of the Jerusalem law, which formally annexes areas of the city over the pre-1967 lines. In December, US President Donald Trump announced

⁷³ <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2018/Pages/President-Rivlin-meets-with-Romanian-Prime-Minister-Viorica-Dăncilă-26-April-2018.aspx>.

the United States recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital and pledged to relocate its embassy. His words are understood to refer solely to West Jerusalem. The US has yet to make any additional policy change to indicate that Jerusalem is part of sovereign Israel."⁷⁴

3. Separate meeting between the President of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania, Liviu Dragnea, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu:

- Israeli official statement: "*Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Romanian Chamber of deputies President Liviu Dragnea and told him, "Thank you for everything you are doing to strengthen our friendship. It is a good friendship. It is getting stronger all the time"*."⁷⁵

- The Chamber of Deputies statement: "*Speaker Liviu Dragnea met with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The discussions focused on assessing the Romanian-Israeli bilateral relations in the context of celebrating 70 years of uninterrupted diplomatic relations, with an emphasis on identifying new opportunities to additionally capitalize on co-operation in areas of shared interest. A special attention was granted to the military area and discussions on strategy. The meeting also reaffirmed the interest in strengthening cooperation in the area of new technologies, with an emphasis on the cyber security sector. The relocation of Romania's Embassy to Jerusalem was also on the meeting agenda. In this context, the Israeli PM hailed the launching by the Government in Romania, of the domestic debates on this topic. Another topic tackled during the talks was connected to the structured inter-parliamentary dialogue (P2P) between Romania and Israel, throughout 2018, giving that there will take place several contacts at parliamentary delegations and also between different parliamentary committees of the two countries. The two officials also underscored the valuable contribution brought to the bilateral relationship by the Israeli community originating from Romania and the Romanian community in Israel. In this context, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies reiterated Romania's commitment to sanction all forms of anti-Semitism and denial of the Holocaust.*"⁷⁶

The emerging new landscape/ profile of the Romanian-Israeli relationships – seemingly inseparable, from now on, from the mantra-like phrase "*the relocation of Romania's Embassy to Jerusalem*" – has had a fairly rapid reverberation, on the one hand internally, through the Romanian political scene and institutional working mechanisms, and, on the other hand, at the EU, respectively, Arab/Palestinian world, levels. Whatever the scale and nature of those reactions, a kind of resilience and recurrence remains an indelible specificity for these relations. Yet another proof is the Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă's meeting with her Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu, who was a special guest at the Quadrilateral Summit of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Serbia (Varna, Bulgaria, November 2, 2018).

⁷⁴ https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Netanyahu-thanks-Romanian-PM-for-pushing-to-move-embassy-to-Jerusalem-552723?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=25-4-2018&utm_content=netanyahu-thanks-romanian-pm-for-pushing-to-move-embassy-to-jerusalem-552723.

⁷⁵ http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Events/Pages/event_dragnea260418.aspx.

⁷⁶ <https://www.agerpres.ro/english/2018/04/26/proposal-on-relocating-romania-s-embassy-to-jerusalem-on-discussions-agenda-of-romania-s-delegation-with-israel-s-president-and-pm-98451>.

The Israeli Prime Minister reiterated his interest in paying a visit to Romania, talking about rescheduling the joint sitting of the two governments. The two officials agreed on holding an economic forum with a panel devoted to business to business contacts before the joint sitting of the governments.

The Romanian Prime Minister reconfirmed Romania's interest in strengthening and deepening relations with the State of Israel in the field of strategic cooperation, cyber and energy security, medicine, research and innovation, presenting to the Israeli counterpart the legislative amendments in the field of public private partnership, amendments which boosted the attractiveness of the Romanian investment environment. Hence, the two Prime Ministers also voiced satisfaction for the advancement of negotiations for the conclusion of Romania-Israel Partnership in the field of new technologies, designed to stimulate the mutual interest of the two countries' business communities, in order to capitalize on the bilateral economic potentials. It was also underlined the importance of strengthening relations in fields such as: health, tourism and education. With the cooperation in the military technologies already a forerunner: in May 2018, Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems signed a cooperation agreement with the Romanian's Romaero to produce air defense and other weapons systems the two companies hope to offer to the Romanian armed forces, including development of the sea-borne version of the Israeli Iron Dome short range missile defense system, as well as Samson remote control weapons systems, and Spike tactical missiles.⁷⁷

In the margin of the meeting, Israeli PM in an interview with a Romanian TV channel underlined the bilateral cooperation *"in matters of security, anti-terror. Romania stands often with Israel in difficult diplomatic arenas and we appreciate this. We recognize our friends and we consider Romanian a great friend."*⁷⁸ "The word *"often"* is, once again, a clear signal that the two countries' foreign policy positions are not always completely overlapping. *"I don't get involved in other states' politics. We only ask them to accept things as they are. [...] I'm not only sure, I know this – I am sure that Romania will consider this situation and a decision will be made so that the embassy is moved to Jerusalem"*⁷⁹, Benjamin Netanyahu said in the context of Varna meeting.

Practically, at least for the short and medium term, the undeniably valued Romania's relationships with Israel are going to be marked by, (i). what is happening in Brussels, with the Romanian Presidency of the European Union Council and, (ii). with regard to the Romanian leadership final decision – if any – on the relocation of the Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Practically, about two weeks before the Israeli PM made the above-mentioned statement, by the middle of October 2018, the Foreign Minister had announced in the Parliament in Bucharest the completion by his ministry of the analysis regarding the relocation of the Romanian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and that after almost six months of work *"based on a comprehensive process of inter-institutional consultation with all relevant institutions and actors, in accordance with the Constitution and the laws in force, as well as taking into account the latest*

⁷⁷ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-romanian-defense-contractors-sign-cooperation-deal-for-iron-dome/>.

⁷⁸ https://www.stiripesurse.ro/pm-netanyahu-says-romania-is-a-great-friend-of-israel-and-cooperation-with-our-country-is-on-an-upward-trajectory_1301044.html.

⁷⁹ <https://www.romania-insider.com/israeli-pm-sure-romania-move-embassy-jerusalem/>.

*developments in this file, including a process of consultation and coordination, consistent and applied with Romania's partners and strategic allies".*⁸⁰

Sent to the Government, by the time of concluding this paper, the document will be further analyzed at that level, and the Prime Minister could decide to have it expedited to the Presidency and the chairmen of the two Chambers of the Parliament. Even if the Foreign Minister was careful of not making public the content *per se* of the would-be governmental decision on the matter, he couldn't prevent himself from letting transpire some kind of "warnings": "*we have to acknowledge that we have here a very complicated problem, with implications of a political, legal, economic and security nature... the analysis mentions the advantages and disadvantages of such an overture that must be "weighed" when taking the decision... both the advantages and disadvantages are very many as it exist potential security risks which represent one of the elements that must be considered; eventually, the Foreign Ministry's analyses includes elements in favor and against the relocation, respectively elements of interest and things which could have a negative effect*⁸¹, making it a balanced document, a coherent and corroborated position to the attention of the decision-makers to be aware of".⁸²

Presumably, what we would call the "diplomatic political correctness" on the matter had calibrated the said position from its very inception stage: "*the objectives of this complex process are subsumed to support Romania's interests. Traditionally, Romania had a balanced position in the Israeli-Palestinian case management, fact confirmed by the bilateral recognition of the Palestinian State for more than three decades. We recall that the balanced position is supported by or country's constant concern regarding the Romanian community both in the State of Israel and in Palestine.*"

Against this backdrop, the Romanian foreign ministry acknowledged from the very beginning "*the need to avoid any actions that could compromise the peace process and reiterated the principle-based position adopted by Romania on a solution for co-existence of the two states, Israel and Palestine, which should live together in peace and security.*"⁸³

It remains to be seen if, at the end, the Romanian diplomats managed to keep the proposed policy line on the issue in "*a reasonable zone of comfort, both in political and diplomatic terms*" given the deep regional and international fault

⁸⁰ <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/45762>.

⁸¹ Rather early in the process, the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, stated that, "a decision of the Government to relocate the Romanian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem will annul any chance to having our country voted as a non-permanent member in the UN Security Council". That in the light of the fact that the new Romanian candidature for such a seat in the Security Council is going to be approved by vote in the UN General Assembly, that forum where, on the occasion of one of its latest actions on the Israeli-Palestinian file, had 127 members in favor (and only eight against) of supporting the principle of having the status of Jerusalem negotiated between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

<http://www.ziare.com/klaus-johannis/liviu-dragnea/iohannis-arata-pericolul-pentru-romania-daca-nemutam-ambasada-la-ierusalim-ar-anula-orice-sansa-1518083>.

⁸² <https://www.nineoclock.ro/2018/06/26/formin-melescanu-analysis-on-relocation-of-romanian-embassy-from-tel-aviv-to-jerusalem-will-be-sent-this-week-to-the-presidency-government-and-parliament/>.

<https://www.euractiv.ro/extern/melescanu-anunta-ca-analiza-privind-mutarea-ambasadei-romaniei-din-israel-este-finalizata-12150>.

<http://www.ziare.com/teodor-melescanu/ministru-de-externe/melescanu-a-terminat-analiza-privind-mutarea-ambasadei-din-israel-e-la-dancila-pentru-aprobare-1533591>.

⁸³ <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/46537>.

lines on Jerusalem as a critical point of the overall still unsolved Israeli-Palestinian/ Arab conflict. The obstacles in this regard had been underlined by two outstanding Romanian experts, from two different, but complementary perspectives.

First, through the essential, but rather restrained prism of the international law, Bogdan Aurescu⁸⁴ proceeded to a (new) review of the major relevant UN documents, starting with the famous General Assembly Resolution 181 (II). *Future government of Palestine (A/RES/181(II)*, dated 29 November 1947), and going to the Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967), 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 271 (1969), 298 (1971), 338 (1973), 446 (1979), 465 (1980), 476, 478 (1980), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008), 2334 (2016), up to the Resolution adopted by the Tenth emergency special session of the UN General Assembly, on 21 December 2017, on *the Status of Jerusalem (A/RES/ES-10/19)* which stated that “*that any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council, and in this regard calls upon all States to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem, pursuant to Council resolution 478 (1980)*”.

Interestingly, if Romania was one of the few countries abstaining on the occasion of the vote⁸⁵, giving the appearance that of a certain “proclivity” on the issue, it was the country’s President, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, who, in a telephone conversation (5 January 2018) with Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, practically reiterated and stressed once again the “*traditional*”, *i.e.* “*legalistic*” and balanced Romanian position: “*Jerusalem represents a central topic within the peace negotiations and its status should be decided only after an agreement between the two parts is signed. During the explanation for its vote, Romania emphasized the necessity of a just and enduring resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by implementing „the solution of the two states”*”⁸⁶. Israel and Palestine should coexist in peace and security, as a unique feasible alternative able to guarantee meeting the aspirations of both sides.

Bogdan Aurescu couldn’t but conclude that, “*a decision to relocate, at this moment, the Romanian embassy will represent not only a violation of the relevant international law, as defined by the appropriate UN Security Council resolutions, but also will affect the unitary position of the EU on this file. It is not hard to anticipate how the EU will receive such a position adopted by a member country exercising the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, a positioning involving, by its very nature, responsibility and equidistance...*”

⁸⁴ Bogdan Aurescu, *Dreptul internațional, Procesul de Pace din Orientul Mijlociu și predictibilitatea politicii externe a României*, April 21, 2018 [*The International Law, The Peace process in the Middle East and the predictability of the foreign policy of Romania*]. <http://www.contributors.ro/editorial/dreptul-interna%C8%99Bional-procesul-de-pace-din-orientul-mijlociu-%C8%99i-predictibilitatea-politicii-externe-a-romaniei/>.

⁸⁵ Romania was not alone in adopting such a position, a fact that was remarked with satisfaction by the Israeli commentators: “*Although Federica Mogherini has been clear on EU’s position regarding the embassy move, six EU states (the V4 states + Romania + Latvia) abstained at the anti-Trump Jerusalem resolution, defying EU position.*”

<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/German-prevention-of-EU-support-for-Israel-echoed-at-the-UN-572616>.

⁸⁶ <http://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/telephone-conversation-of-president-of-romania-mr-klaus-iohannis-with-prime-minister-of-israel-mr-benjamin-netanyahu>.

hence, for keeping the predictability of the Romanian foreign policy, while observing the international law and maintaining the credibility of Romania's balanced diplomatic action, it is possible just one conclusion: a decision to relocate the Romanian Embassy to Jerusalem cannot be taken but after the finalization, with the parties' agreement, a durable solution of the Peace Process, including the convening of the Jerusalem's status".

Second, there are experts who couldn't fail sensing the risk of absolutizing the application of international law to such a complex issue. In particular it is worth mentioning that Dan Dungaciu⁸⁷ glosses on a larger vision and a more comprehensive approach, which could imply a necessary, and useful, relativization of the international law, namely placing in a multi-prong narrative the international fora's principles and resolutions on the matter.

Indeed, one should open larger the perspective, including for the fact that, "that the international policy frequently functions in parallel with domains like the ethics, or that of the law, without negating their relevance". Hence, "one cannot arrive to such a decision as the eventual relocation of the Romanian Embassy to Jerusalem but after putting into the balance all possible arguments: from values, to opportunities, relations with partners, as well as the consequences of diplomatic, economic political or military nature." At least three categories of other factors come to complicate further the context: (i). the element seemingly of an immanent nature: "whoever would replace the actual Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu could bring with him (only) changes in style, governing manner and public arguments, but would never alter the essence of the matter; respectively that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish state, hence that state is doing what it is possible to have the (foreign) embassies relocated over there"; (ii). in MENA region, with its deeply labyrinthine profile, and which has been marked by many points where "one cannot see the forest for the trees", we are now witnessing evolutions, like those related to the Palestinian-Jewish demographics, which are incontrovertibly exposing one or another of the region's "today's forests", namely "that the Arab area is in a big defensive, the Palestinian conflict including."^{88,89}

⁸⁷ Dan Dungaciu, *Problema Ambasadei din Israel, în 10 puncte: dilemele echidistanței în Orientul mijlociu și dilemele relocării*, April 23, 2018 [The Problem of the Embassy in Israel, in 10 points: the equidistance dilemmas in the Middle East and the dilemmas of the relocation]. <http://ispri.ro/dan-dungaciu-problema-ambasadei-din-israel-in-10-puncte-dilemele-echidistanței-in-orientul-mijlociu-si-dilemele-relocării/>.

Episodul Israel – o greșeală repetată, vizibilă și periculoasă. România e pusă, de președinte și MAE, în cea mai proastă situație, Dan Dungaciu Interview cu Ziare.com, May 16 2018 [The Israeli episode – a recurrent error, visible and dangerous. Romania is placed, by the President and the Foreign Ministry in the worst situation, Dan Dungaciu Interview with Ziare.com]. <http://www.ziare.com/international/israel/episodul-israel-o-greșeala-repetată-vizibilă-si-periculoasă-romania-e-pusă-de-presedinte-si-mae-in-cea-mai-proastă-situație-interviu-1513734>.

⁸⁸ "It's not that Arab countries have decided to withdraw their support for the Palestinians, but rather the nature of that support has become fragmented. This shift reflects the more general fragmentation afflicting the Arab world since the uprisings of 2011. With some states still reeling from the aftershocks of the "Arab Spring", a resultant prioritization of domestic security and economic concerns on the part of key countries such as Egypt, as well as intra-Arab disputes that continue to simmer or intensify, the geopolitical bandwidth of many Arab countries has narrowed at the expense of the Palestinian cause. The ongoing schism within the Palestinian national movement has likewise undermined Palestinian efforts to solicit and receive assistance." *What Happened to Arab Support for the Palestinians?* BESA Center DEBATE, November 16, 2018.

<https://besacenter.org/online-debates/palestinians-arab-support/>.

⁸⁹ "From Qatar to Iran, none of the countries participating in the MED2018 conference (Rome, November 22-24, 2018) seemed really interested in the Palestinians. Normalization with Israel, on the other hand,

(iii). Need for approaching the issue in the right “setting/venue”, and that could prove a really critical aspect, hence Dan Dungaciu’s recourse to the metaphorical argumentation: “*the debate should not be done outrightly on the (open) scene, but behind it and it is with the taken decision that comes out*”. In other words, “*the successful foreign policy is largely invisible... Sometimes, successful foreign policy even means keeping real victories quiet.*”⁹⁰; (iv). Every diplomatic project and concrete action must eventually be validated by the least common denominator – *the national interest*, as defined and promoted by the State’s constitutionally legitimate institutions. The intersection of the “real” national interest trajectory with those of the political groups/ parties or even leaders’ interests, as seemingly happened for the case in point of the Romanian Embassy relocation from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, could sometimes prove counterproductive, and that in terms of both the country’s foreign policy effectiveness and of its diplomacy’s credibility and image.⁹¹

All that because, eventually, as adroitly put by Iulian Fota on the issue of Embassy’s relocation, Romania should not “take the side” of US and Israel, of that of the EU, but, “*on the side of its own interests, which should be defined so that the people know what they want. Like any other country, we should take care before anything else about our own interest, and this is what are doing Germany, and France, etc. The United States when they relocated their Embassy took also into account their national interests. Similarly, Israel, when it wants its capital to Jerusalem it is answering to its own interests. This is the logic of the game – the national interest.*”⁹²

Eventually, it is in the realm of the national interest that one could see possible “red lines” in the relativization of the international law principles with regard to the Jerusalem issue with its critical “branch”, namely the localization of foreign embassies accredited in the State of Israel. Here is the case of the “gradual approach” implemented by the Czech Republic – “*one of the friendliest countries to Israel in Europe*”, in the Israeli commentators’ view – whose president, Miloš Zeman, inaugurated by the end of November 2018, “an office” in Jerusalem, considered as the precursor to moving the country’s embassy to the city. Or, as the Czech head of state said, *this “Czech House, which will house the Czech cultural, investment, trade and tourism offices” represents “the first step*

was all the rage: ‘It’s a total change in paradigm’”. <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-netanyahu-s-vision-for-the-middle-east-has-come-true-1.6681949>.

⁹⁰ James Goldgeier, Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Good Foreign Policy Is Invisible*, Foreign Affairs, February 28, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-02-28/good-foreign-policy-invisible>.

⁹¹ Romania herself offers instances when such an intersection had generated a positive energy: “*the promotion of Romania’s interests whatever the Government in power is reflected in all governing programmes of the parties that ruled Romania during the period 1919-1939 (with the exception of Octavian Goga’s 44 days government)*”.

Cristina Arvatu Vohn, *Politică externă și securitate în România interbelică – o analiză cantitativă (1919-1939)* – [*Foreign Policy and Security in Inter-War Romania – a quantitative analysis (1919-1939)*] Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018.

⁹² *Interviu cu Iulian Fota*, Ziare.com, 15 Mai 2018 [*Interview with Iulian Fota*, Ziare.com, May 15, 2018]. <http://www.ziare.com/vasilica-viorica-dancila/premier/suntem-in-criza-majora-de-functionare-a-statalui-roman-de-ce-nu-ni-se-spune-care-e-miza-nationala-in-privinta-ambasadei-din-israel-interviu-1513627>.

*with the intention to relocate the embassy of the Czech Republic to Jerusalem, in accordance with international law” , in other words, back to... the principles of the international law.*⁹³

A particular application of gradual approach combined with the principles of the international law has been offered by Russia which, in April 2017, surprised many by recognizing Western Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. However, Moscow has made plain that it considers East Jerusalem the capital of a future Palestinian state and vehemently opposed the US administration’s December 6 decision to recognize all Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.⁹⁴ By the end of December 2018, Australia’s Prime Minister announced that his country „now recognizes West Jerusalem as being the seat of the Knesset (Israeli parliament)... West Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. We look forward to moving our embassy to West Jerusalem, when practical, in support of and after a final status determination. We’ve decided to start the work there now, to identify a suitable site for an Australian embassy in West Jerusalem. A two state solution remains the only viable way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The obstacles, we must admit, to achieving such a solution are becoming insurmountable. Australia has resolved to acknowledge the aspirations of Palestinians people for a future state with its capital in East Jerusalem.”⁹⁵

Alongside Jerusalem & Gaza, Iran comes to complete an arc of sensitive issues generated by MENA region for the Romanian diplomacy included. To think just about the “Pandora’s box” opened by the fact that, reacting to the introduction of a second wave of US sanctions against Iran, on November 4th, Federica Mogherini, the EU foreign policy chief, and the foreign ministers of the UK, France and Germany have all stressed continued support for the JCPOA and their determination to establish a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to shield trade with Iran from the sanctions. However, discussions over an SPV have been under way for months and continue to stumble over the designation of a host country, amid fears of US retaliation. Even with the SPV in place, most firms would probably consider trade with Iran as either too risky or impossible, given links to the US market.⁹⁶

But the risks could be yet bigger, even if from the Romanian diplomacy public statements apparently doesn’t transpire too much concern. Reaching and staying long in a irremediably dichotomist mode, the issue of the relations with Israel and Iran could position for too long and too consequentially Romania and the other EU members in the uncomfortable and damaging posture between a

⁹³ <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Czech-president-arrives-in-Israel-to-inaugurate-embassy-precursor-in-Jerusalem-572750>.

⁹⁴ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-rare-move-russian-embassy-to-host-its-national-day-party-in-jerusalem/>.

⁹⁵ <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/leaders/they-made-a-mistake-australia-cops-global-backlash-after-scott-morrison-recognised-west-jerusalem-as-israels-capital/news-story/e1b75095d906a160131fc75aed84e385>.

⁹⁶ *Nuclear deal signatories commit to Iran*, The Economist Intelligence Unit, November 9th 2018. http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1927328376&Country=Iran&topic=Politics&subtopic=Foreign%20affairs&subsubtopic=International+relations&u=1&pid=1507333734&oid=1507333734&uid=1&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTm90eS9HRTF.

rock and a hard place. On the one hand, “*Trump’s Iran Sanctions are especially costly for America’s closest allies*”.⁹⁷ On the other hand, repeating and hardening by the Iranian leaders their well-known position on Israel would prove really untenable if not outright repellant, hence the need for the EU to show in the strongest terms its unacceptability, as of November 25, 2018: (Iranian) “*President Rouhani’s remarks bringing into question Israel’s legitimacy are totally unacceptable. They are also incompatible with the need to address international disputes through dialogue and international law. The European Union reiterates its fundamental commitment to the security of Israel, including with regard to current and emerging threats in the region.*”⁹⁸

And when we remember that the 2018-2020 Governing Programme as published in “Monitorul Oficial” at the beginning of 2018, included a provision on “*relaunching the relations with Iran, stressing on the economic dimension*”. As an expression of traditionally well-balanced relations between Romania and MENA countries, it is to be noticed that even though today’s relationships with *Iran* are some of the most complex and difficult to be managed by Bucharest’s diplomacy, one cannot underestimate the “seeds” of future regeneration and expansion, like the Iranians who graduated from Romanian universities, many of them now forming an active business community, or working in the Romanian medical sector.

Neither some of the Israeli Government’s messages towards Brussels would make always happy at least part of the EU members, which could make difficult the job of the country at the helm of the rotating Presidency. Just to remember what the Israeli PM had to say on the occasion of his participation, as special guest, to the Quadrilateral Summit of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Serbia (Varna, Bulgaria, November 2, 2018): “*This is not just a meeting of friends. It is also a bloc of countries with whom I want to promote my policy, to change the hypocritical and hostile attitude of the EU.*”⁹⁹ The problem is that what is perceived by the Israeli right-wing PM as EU “*hypocritical and hostile attitude*” towards Israel is extended on a large array of what we already mentioned as being “sensitive issues”. Practically, Netanyahu has been regularly making such comments against the European Union, which is critical of Israel’s occupation of and settlement building in the West Bank. Beyond the conflict with the Palestinians, the Israeli premier has also been eager to convince European countries to exert more pressure on Iran. EU countries have been at odds with the United States since it pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers and reimposed sanctions – something long advocated by Israel. Consistent with himself, the Israeli PM stated at a press conference on the sidelines of the WWI commemorations in Paris, that “*Israel is Europe’s shield in the Middle East [from terrorism], and*

⁹⁷ <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/26796/trump-s-iran-sanctions-are-especially-costly-for-america-s-closest-allies>.

⁹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/54388/statement-spokesperson-remarks-president-rouhani-israel_en.

⁹⁹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/israeli-leader-netanyahu-warns-eu-nation-iranian-plots-european-soil-bulgaria/29578309.html>.

without us it would spread and many more people would push into Europe. When we protect ourselves, we are also protecting Europe.” He also suggested European leaders should “change their approach to us” as a result of this alleged protection. “We certainly have criticism of the one-sided and hostile approach of the European Union to Israel” said the Israeli prime minister, singling out European funding for human rights groups that document alleged abuses by Israeli soldiers.^{100, 101}

The EU is unhappy about Netanyahu’s tough statements regarding his effort to change Europe’s attitude toward Israel. But Brussels remain the adept of “moderation” in conter-reacting: the EU’s spokesperson published a statement according to which “*The European Union and Israel enjoy strong, reciprocal and useful ties. The EU is Israel’s largest economic partner and we have a strong political alliance, and full commitment to the security and welfare of Israel.*”¹⁰²

Romania – MENA, a New Neighborhood in the Making The Rankings’ Moving Images: 5 + 3 + 3 Indexes

Motto:

“Democratization is always an ambidextrous process. On the one hand, it triggers a universalistic set of norms, events, processes and symbols. On the other hand, democratization involves a much more particularistic set of ‘realistic’ adaptations to the structures and circumstances of individual countries.”¹⁰³

One can say that, at the end of “the common Century (1918-2018)” and the beginning of a new historic time with common challenges, “a brand-new neighborhood” has been evolving between Romania and the Middle East. We have in view *the potentially effervescent space, in political, social, economic and technological terms*, emerging at the intersection of the new realities generated in the wake of December 1989 Romanian revolution, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the developments in the MENA region following the initiation of reforms and changes in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings, whatever fragile and weak could they be looking right now.

To the area of proximity defined in the traditionally geographical terminologies and parameters, so valued in the links, commercial and humans, along centuries between the two sides, it could come to be added now, conceptually and pragmatically, an embryonic – in some instances, more than that – “neighborhood”, delineated by the challenging composite of values and principles related to the modern rule-of-law, democracy, respect for human rights, combatting corruption. That is not

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/at-wwi-centenary-netanyahu-says-israel-shielding-europe-from-terrorism/>.

¹⁰¹ Less than two weeks after that message from the Israeli PM, the press from his country had to complain that, at a vote in the UN General Assembly, “*Nine biased resolutions were adopted against Israel. Eight received full support from all EU states. Not even one of the 28 states (soon to be 27) abstained.*”

<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/German-prevention-of-EU-support-for-Israel-echoed-at-the-UN-572616>.

¹⁰² <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/254180>.

¹⁰³ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13629395.2016.1220109>.

mere rhetoric: a relevant “*metrics*” could be advanced in this regard, even if, for the time being, the results are far from being definitive. The main motivation: both sides, Romania, respectively the Middle East’s countries, have been going through open-ended transformative evolutions, with Romania supposedly enjoying a sort of comparative advantage, having already been installed in that “new area” two-three decades earlier. Supposedly it was a successful Romanian “relocation”, wasn’t it?

Some fresh data available at the time of writing provided the opportunity to concretely checking this significant aspect from *the comparative perspective, Romania – MENA countries* and that corroborating the data provided by five distinct, yet theoretically and practically connected, recent studies, namely: *Freedom in the World 2018/ Freedom House*¹⁰⁴, *The Democracy Index 2017/The Economist Intelligence Unit (The EIU)*¹⁰⁵, *The Rule of Law Index 2017-2018/The World Justice Project*¹⁰⁶, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2017/ Transparency International*¹⁰⁷, *Fragile States Index State Fragility In 2017/The Fund for Peace*¹⁰⁸. Some conclusions:

(i). In the brand “*new neighborhood of rule of law and democracy*”, Romania has already got some “close neighbors” which geographically belong to the MENA region: in the case of *Freedom* – Israel and Tunisia; in the case of *Democracy* – Tunisia; in the case of *Rule of Law* – United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan, Tunisia; in the case of *Corruption* – UAE, Qatar, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan; in the case of *Fragile States Index* – UAE, Qatar, Oman.

(ii). It is true that, for the period under consideration, 2016-2017-2018, *most* of the Middle East nations continued to be only *marginally “located”* in the new neighborhood, in other words, still being inserted in the area with a negative connotation, if not outright in the bottom of the rankings, so thoroughly determined by each of the five studies quoted: Syria, almost in every case, but also Yemen, or even Egypt. Democracy/ democratization has been for quite some time the case in point, almost the entire region lagging behind to other areas of the world.

(iii). One striking aspect could be the inferior ranking recorded by Romania comparatively with some of the MENA’s countries in the case of: (i). *Democracy Index*, where Romania has a Global Ranking of 64, while Israel is located over 30 places in advance – *Israel remaining the top-ranked regionally from this point of view*¹⁰⁹; (ii). for the *Corruption Index*, four Middle East nations, Israel included, were better ranked than Romania, (iv) similarly, for the *Fragile Index*.

¹⁰⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>.

¹⁰⁵ http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2017.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex2017.

¹⁰⁶ https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/WJP_ROLI_2017-18_Online-Edition_0.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017.

¹⁰⁸ <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/2017/05/14/fragile-states-index-2017-annual-report/951171705-fragile-states-index-annual-report-2017/>.

¹⁰⁹ http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2017.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex2017.

“*Since its establishment, Israel remains an exemplary democratic state sharing the universal values of the Western world.*” Amb. Freddy Eytan, *The Failures of the International Community in the Middle East since the Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1916-2016*, in *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, 2016. <http://jcpa.org/the-failures-in-the-middle-east-since-the-sykes-picot-agreement/>.

Of course, beyond the appearance of a competition among countries, the end-results of the five indexes are rather a matter of competition inside each nation, and that essentially between internal reform forces and status quo forces and vectors.

Against such a backdrop, of critical importance is the nexus between the progress on the rule of law and democracy, on the one hand, and the evolution of the internal basic factors of general progress – education, health, income, employment, human security etc. In this regard, we notice an almost perfect overlapping between rankings in the five studies analyzed above and the rankings provided by three other relevant studies:

1. *The Human Development Index (HDI)/Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone/ United Nations Development Programme*¹¹⁰ which provides ranks and HDIs for 188 countries using data on basic indicators like: *National income and composition of resources, Work and employment, Health outcomes, Education achievements, Human security, Gender Development Index, Multidimensional Poverty Index etc.* Results: three MENA nations recorded higher ranks comparatively with Romania: Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE.

2. *The Human Capital Index (HCI)/Insight Report. The Global Human Capital Report 2017. Preparing people for the future of work/ World Economic Forum 2017*¹¹¹: calculated the *country ranks* and HDI scores for 130 countries using data on indicators related to: the *education systems, preparedness for the labor market of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, skill diversity, digital skills, employment gender and age gaps.* Results: one MENA country, namely Israel, is preceding Romania in ranking and index.

3. *World Happiness Report 2018/Sustainable Development Solutions Network.*¹¹² Country rankings based on average scores calculated considering six key variables/ factors: *Income/ GDP per capita, Healthy life expectancy, Social support, Perceived Freedom to make life choices, Generosity, Perception of corruption.* Results: five MENA countries with higher scores/ rankings and index than Romania: Israel, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Practically, for this latter Index, we find Romania in the less enviable position of being overtaken by MENA nations in all of the six underlying factors.

Some additional economic and social indicators could enlighten us more on the present and give a glimpse on hopefully not far future for this “new neighborhood”:

(i). *The Global Competitiveness Report 2017-2018/ The World Economic Forum, 2017*¹¹³: Rankings for 137 economies based on the Global Competitiveness

¹¹⁰ *Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone*, in *United Nations Development Programme*. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf.

¹¹¹ *Insight Report. The Global Human Capital Report 2017. Preparing people for the future of work*, in *World Economic Forum 2017*. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Human_Capital_Report_2017.pdf.

¹¹² Helliwell, J., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (2018). *World Happiness Report 2018*, New York: *Sustainable Development Solutions Network*.

<http://worldhappiness.report>; https://s3.amazonaws.com/happiness-report/2018/WHR_web.pdf.

¹¹³ <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2017-2018/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2017%E2%80%932018.pdf>.

Index 2017-2018 (GCI), combines 114 indicators, as a measure of national competitiveness, defined as the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity. Results: Romania behind seven MENA states: Israel, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Jordan.

(ii). *The Inclusive Growth and Development Report 2017/The World Economic Forum, 2017*¹¹⁴ bringing to light a new global index, *the Inclusive Development Index (IDI)* for 109 economies, as a way to improve our understanding of how countries can use a diverse spectrum of policy incentives and institutional mechanisms to making economic growth more socially inclusive without dampening incentives to work, save and invest. Results: Romania behind one MENA nation Israel.

Instead of Conclusions: Flashpoints on the Horizon of a New Century

Along with the necessary and urgent revamping in the political and security situation on the ground, nationally and regionally, the economic improvements, in technological, work force skills and managerial terms, unquestionably could equally, even if specifically, lead to better indexes and scores for Romania and different MENA countries, revealing as such positive changes in the overall landscape of *the new neighborhood*. Of course, for MENA region first things first: finding ways to end wars and rebuild, plus civilian stabilization efforts through quantifiable objectives rather than open-ended good intentions.¹¹⁵

All that with a caveat for both Europe and the Middle East, as in the case of other regions of the world: accepting that, (i). essentially, one has to deal with “*homegrown crisis*”; (ii). *the issue of leaders/leadership could be pivotal in the process of seeking for and implementing practically the solutions*. Certainly, not the kind of “*the narcissistic and belligerent personalities of certain world leaders*”¹¹⁶ that we see now, here and there, and especially knowing that “*democracies may die at the hands not of generals but of elected leaders*”¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-inclusive-growth-and-developmentreport-2017>.

¹¹⁵ For other issues, solutions appear more on hand: The United Arab Emirates, the happiest Arab country and the 20th happiest nation in the world, according to the “*World Happiness Report 2018*” (as discussed above), unveiled, in March 2018, an initiative called “*The Alif Yaa Saada*”/meaning “*Happiness from A to Z*”, as a UAE blueprint for bringing happiness expertise to the Arab region. The initiative will work with local institutions in almost every Arab country to train locals on how to find happiness in everyday life, teaching local people positive attitudes, tolerance and generosity, and trying to spread positive ideas about the empowerment of women, coexistence and peacemaking. Notably, the UAE stunned the Arab world in February 2016 when it appointed a minister of state for happiness. This was unprecedented in a region torn by conflicts, sectarian strife and animosities. *Emirati initiative brings happiness expertise to Egypt*, in *The Arab Weekly*, April 15, 2018.

<https://theArabweekly.com/emirati-initiative-brings-happiness-expertise-egypt>.

¹¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/12/syria-elements-world-wars-west-leaders-escalate-history>.

¹¹⁷ https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/books/review/steven-levitsky-daniel-ziblatt-how-democracies-die.html?emc=edit_bk_20180413&nl=book-.

Indeed, “*The current ills of liberal democracy are deep and pervasive. Surmounting them will require intellectual clarity and political leaders who are willing to take risks to serve the long-term interests of their countries.*”¹¹⁸

We have in view leaders who are called, before anything else, “*to confront their own shortcomings. That means upgrading institutions, improving democratic accountability, reducing economic and social inequality, and striving to ensure that globalization works for all.*”¹¹⁹ Seemingly, “*The next generation of Middle Eastern rulers, whether in Iran or in the Arab states, will not have the luxury to rule as autocratically as their predecessors, even as democratic experiments in the region show that while elections are easily accomplished, stable and liberal democracies orders are processes that can take generations to refine... Young populations, as we have seen in the Arab Spring, are the most likely (ferment) to force upheaval and change.*”¹²⁰ This Robert D. Kaplan’s meaningful observation is shared by James L. Gelvin: “*The breadth and depth of the protests and uprisings that have engulfed the Arab world, Iran, Turkey, and Israel indicate that agitation for good governance is not a transient or localized phenomenon in the Middle East. As such, the history of the past thirty years cannot but disturb the sleep of politicians, kings, and dictators throughout the region.*”¹²¹ On the other hand, one cannot disregard that any evolution will continue to be the resultant of internal and external factors inter-play and cross-fertilization. Thus, of particular interest would be the impact, if any, over the progress in democracy, rule of law and human rights for the countries analyzed here, of the global trends in the field. Or, any objective “periscope” will indicate a far from encouraging perspective. The quasi-general *mantra* of scholarly studies and analyses, shared by politicians’ opinions, on the subject-matter is nothing else but: “*the future of the liberal order is in doubt... its three components – liberalism, universality, and the preservation of order itself – are being challenged as never before in its 70 year history. First, liberalism is in retreat. Democracies are feeling the effects of growing populism. Parties of the political extremes have gained ground in Europe...* ”¹²²

In his first public speech, the fresh foreign minister of Germany, Heiko Maas, installed in March 2018, with the new Government in Bonn, warned that, “*erosion of liberal, rules-based, democratic order that we believe in has gone further than we thought possible five years ago. We have to defend things that we took for granted until now.*”

All that up to the inevitable question “*whether, inside the European Union, a self-declared club of democracies, there can be an autocracy – i.e. where elections would still be held in the future, but a real turnover of power would be impossible*”.¹²³ If the very essence of that question would be placed, fully

¹¹⁸ https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy/?utm_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=6227.

¹¹⁹ Shlomo Ben-Ami, *op. cit.*

¹²⁰ Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography. What the Map Tell Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*, Random House, New York, 2012, pp. 259-260.

¹²¹ James L. Gelvin, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

¹²² Richard N. Haass, *Liberal World Order, R.I.P.*, Project Syndicate, March 21, 2018.

<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/end-of-liberal-world-order-by-richard-n-haass-2018-03>.

¹²³ Jan-Werner Müller, ‘Democracy’ Still Matters, *The New York Times*, April 5, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/05/opinion/hungary-viktor-orban-populism.html>.

legitimately, “in the mirror”, i.e. against the backdrop of the European/Western situation and, respectively, the Middle East present evolutions, the answer risks being “yes”, for Europe included, no matter how surprising that could appear. Unless one forgets that we speak, in the case of Europe also, about a region “beset by deep social inequalities, reinforced in recent decades by poorly managed globalization; its political establishment has become increasingly disconnected from the public, much as it did in interwar Europe – a development that fueled the rise of fascism and populist authoritarianism, a dynamic particularly apparent in the EU, where many decisions are in the hands of a distant and unaccountable bureaucracy lacking in sufficient democratic legitimacy” – as well as from the other part, where “*The Euroscepticism of Eastern Europe’s “illiberal democracies” reflects deep-seated religious and authoritarian traditions, which have impeded these societies’ internalization of the EU’s post-modern culture of secular tolerance and universal values*”.¹²⁴

Not underestimating the relatively recent powerfully “actor” on the ever more complicating scene of the human civilization engulfed in the *Fourth Industrial Revolution* and what we can characterize as its “*the genie out of the bottle*” – the Internet, which hasn’t eschewed at all the MENA region: “*The problem is that the internet is such a powerful tool that it can compel voters to vote when they didn’t intend to or to vote for a candidate they didn’t initially want to vote for, not because they were persuaded to but because of some unique and non-rational power that a company like Cambridge Analytica can harness... if the internet has the ability to control – rather than influence – someone’s mind, then democracy is endangered.*”¹²⁵

“*The danger on the democracy*” is seen by Yuval Noah Harari in the broader perspective of information collecting and analyzing, fully consonant with the present realities all over the Planet: “*As the conditions of processing the data during the 21st Century will change once again, democracy could be faced with the decline, even to disappear. As data volume and speed increase, venerable institutions like elections, political parties and parliaments could become obsolete, and that not because they wouldn’t be ethical, but due to the fact they wouldn’t be able to process the data with enough efficiency...the traditional democratic politics loses the control of events and do not succeed to offer significant visions on the future.*”¹²⁶

Once more one can say that, the peoples are more than ever in need of legitimate and responsible elites – of, course, not in the sense of an “*elitist, out-of-touch clan of intellectuals*”¹²⁷ – but people capable to engage and a difference everywhere,

¹²⁴ Shlomo Ben-Ami, *The Threat to Western Democracy Starts at Home*, Project Syndicate, March 26, 2018. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/real-threat-to-western-democracy-globalization-by-shlomo-ben-ami-2018-03?utm_source=Project+Syndicate+Newsletter&utm_campaign=08e1b5da81-

¹²⁵ https://geopoliticalfutures.com/marketing-delegitimization-elections/?utm_source=GPF+-+from+George+Friedman&utm_campaign=225c62cf9d-

¹²⁶ Yuval Noah Harari, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-327.

¹²⁷ “*Seventy years after its founding, Israel’s once-ruling Labor party has virtually no political influence. There are many reasons for that, but its reputation as an elitist, out-of-touch clan of European intellectuals is prime among them.*” <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-04-19/independence-day-israel-s-first-70-years-surprised->

in Europe as well as in the MENA region. And the realities on the ground will show the results. Vladimir Nabokov once wrote: “*reality is one of the few words that means nothing without quotation marks.*” Seeing that in the context of our centennials and celebrations, the chances for a *meaningful and substantial content* between those *quotation marks* could be conditional/with caveats as it was already underlined in one of our opening *Mottos* in PART I: “*To admit that we can do nothing about what happened among the dead is not to give up the struggle for a better world, but to concentrate our efforts where they have at least some hope of making things better for the living.*”¹²⁸

Only that, given the MENA regional turmoil and the complicated and tensed overall international juncture, as at the end of the 1918-2018, the best that can be hoped for is that a new Century will not be worse. Can anybody can guarantee even that for the MENA region?!

Maybe yes if one heeds at least the advice of local analysts: “*deal with crises with two different approaches. First, the specifics of each case should be taken separately due to the different ‘composition’ of Arab entities and their geographic locations and demographics. Second, there is a need to recognize there are more pervasive dangers, beyond the current existential limits, that seek to change the broader regional reality.*”¹²⁹ One among many others “*more pervasive dangers*”: “*Bristling with advanced armaments, to say nothing of weapons of mass destruction, the Middle East of the next few decades will make the recent era of Arab-Israeli state conflict seem like a romantic, sepia-toned chapter of the Cold War and Post-Cold War, in which calculations of morality and strategic advantage were relatively clear-cut*”.¹³⁰

Seemingly, forging of the perspective in the case of Romania has a clearer contour: “*for Romania, which is not (anymore) an object with movements dictated by external forces, having a favorable destiny – or not – depends on the quality of the overwhelming majority of her people; also, a favorable destiny is conditional on the concurrence of the basic impulses of the majority with a lucid and responsible vision on the reality.*”¹³¹ Otherwise, and concluding on a more optimistic note, one can speak about a commonality or perspective for both Romania and “neighbors” from MENA region: “*there is nothing inevitable about democratic decline. Rising prosperity continues to move most developing countries toward democracy – although, as always, the trajectory is not a linear one. And in the developed world, the current wave of authoritarianism will persist only if societies and governments fail to address the underlying drivers. If new political coalitions emerge to reverse the trend toward inequality and ensure that the benefits of automation are widely shared, they can put democracy back on track.*”¹³²

¹²⁸ Thomas Sowell, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

¹²⁹ Eyad Abu Shakra, *Middle East's Problems More Complex Than Ever*, in *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 10 April, 2018. <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1233056/eyad-abu-shakra/middle-east%E2%80%99s-problems-more-r>.

¹³⁰ Robert D. Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

¹³¹ Interview with Mihai Sora, *Revista22.ro*, No. 2 (1451)/16-22 January 2018.

¹³² Ronald Inglehart, *The Age of Insecurity. Can Democracy Save Itself?*, in *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2018 Issue. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-04-16/age-insecurity>.

As such, the continued commonality of destiny and major objectives, with an extended sense of neighborhood, will maintain the centrality of MENA region on the radar of the Romanian diplomacy. All that on the backdrop and in the spirit of the European Union's overarching Common Foreign and Security Policy objectives: promoting international peace and security, preventing conflicts, defending democratic principles and human rights, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, fighting terrorism. Of course, none of the principled goals and concrete policies could escape the test of the realities on the ground, and in this regard, it was salutary the initiative of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) to be explored, within the framework of *the Doha Forum 2018*, "*Europe's role in responding to deepening polarization across the MENA region, how Europeans can best navigate regional fault lines, and how they might play a role defusing tensions and helping lay a foundation for a more inclusive regional security framework.*" With the hope of outlining answers to two critical questions: "*Would regional players welcome a larger European role? How would this larger role align with the policies of other external actors, namely the U.S. and Russia?*"¹³³

Only that the EU, Romania included, cannot lose sight on the overall picture, one dominated by "*the deterioration of a world order (which) can set in motion trends that spell catastrophe. ... What we are seeing today resembles the mid-nineteenth century in important ways: the post-World War II, post-Cold War order cannot be restored, but the world is not yet on the edge of a systemic crisis. Now is the time to make sure one never materializes, be it from a breakdown in U.S.-Chinese relations, a clash with Russia, a conflagration in the Middle East, or the cumulative effects of climate change. The good news is that it is far from inevitable that the world will eventually arrive at a catastrophe; the bad news is that it is far from certain that it will not.*"¹³⁴

Almost concomitantly, but thousands of kilometers away, in the very heart of MENA, the agenda of *the Doha Forum 2018* was focused on similarly critical interconnected actual evolutions¹³⁵: "*This is the dawn of new world order, one where old certainties are being replaced...*", respectively, "*The recent rise of populist politics and other socio-political changes have shaken today's global order... populist and hyper-nationalist groups have garnered mainstream political support across the globe, altering the dynamic of existing social movements and opening up space for new ones to emerge... many countries that were once on the path to democratization have undergone authoritarian reversals.*"

A bon entendeur, salut!

NOTE: A selective bibliography was presented at the end of PART I.

¹³³ <https://dohaforum.org/session/>.

¹³⁴ Richard Haass, *How a World Order Ends And What Comes in Its Wake*, in *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2019 Issue.

¹³⁵ <https://dohaforum.org/session/>.