

ROMANIAN AND BRITISH STRATEGIC CULTURE AFTER THE COLD WAR: ALIGNMENT AND ENDURANCE

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Abstract

This article aims to assess the alignment of British and Romanian strategic cultures after the end of the Cold War. It explores the development of academic discourse on British strategic culture and adds to the emerging debate on how Romanian strategic culture has been evolving since the overthrow of its communist regime. Engagement with the existing literature on strategic culture highlights how British strategic culture is centred on three core principles, all providing opportunities for Romanian strategic culture as well. Firstly, Britain's 'special relationship' with the United States, especially now that the country has left the European Union, provides Romania with interesting triangulation opportunities, given the importance of Romania's own Strategic Partnership with the US. Secondly, Britain's strategic culture is defined by its nuclear deterrent, which provides considerable security incentives for Romania, now that Britain has left the EU. Thirdly, Britain regards itself as a naval power, and Romania has been supporting over the past decades the notion of the Black Sea as a core security area of NATO, alliance of which both countries are members of. In this context, there is ample opportunity for the two countries to consolidate NATO's eastern flank, develop security strategies that use similar language, and expand on existing economic ties. The article's core argument is that Romania's path of alignment with the west after the Cold War has led to a security and economic relationship with Britain that is much stronger and economically resilient than it would first appear, especially given setbacks such as Romania's democratic backsliding in the 1990s, or Britain's decision to leave the EU in 2016. Most importantly, the article adds to the ongoing academic analysis on strategic culture, focusing on two countries that are less prominent in the debates, the United Kingdom and Romania.

Keywords: Romania, United Kingdom, Cold War.

The end of the Cold War saw Romania overthrow its communist regime and begin a decades-long process of alignment with the west. This development was encouraged and supported by the United Kingdom due to a wide variety of reasons, ranging from national security well into the economic and diplomatic. This article aims to assess how Romanian and British strategic cultures began a process of alignment in the 1990s, which would later culminate with Romania's adherence into what can be called "western strategic culture," NATO and EU membership being prime examples. It will also look at how the two countries have developed

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their process of alignment despite key events that were expected to have a detrimental effect to the relationship, such as Brexit.

How strategic culture is defined

Given the broad definition of the term strategic culture, for this study, the analysis will be structured around the following approach: key events will be analysed, as well as their impact on the strategic culture of the two countries, as it is common in strategic culture studies to place key historical developments as the main drivers of shifts within strategic cultures themselves. The analysis will then focus on whether a notion of shared norms and values emerges between the two states, since a harmonization of key principles and ideas is also known to play a considerable role in influencing strategic culture. Moreover, the analysis will then move on examples of deeper integration especially in the realm of national security, such as an assessment of Romania and Britain's growing military cooperation, both in terms of signed treaties and military exercises (both countries have a particular interest in naval security in the Black Sea) in order to see whether the alignment between London and Bucharest is robust enough to endure more challenging times. For example, a case will be made that Brexit has had little effect on deterring the alignment of British and Romanian strategic cultures, the argument being that security on NATO's eastern flank and cooperation with like-minded allies was more important to Britain than the presumed geopolitical realignments that leaving the EU would demand. Moreover, a case will be made that the economic potential Britain saw in Romania, and the resulting economic ties between the two, have also established a stronger connection than the threat posed by Brexit or Romania's occasional democratic backsliding.

In his *Cultural realism: strategic culture and grand strategy in Chinese history*, Alastair Ian Johnson expands on the literature and definitions of strategic culture. He explores the notion that there are persistent historical patterns in how states and elites can use force for political ends, observing that states have "strategic preferences" which are shaped by "formative" military experiences. He also reminds that strategic culture changes slowly, being less susceptible to shocks. The argument goes that there must be a historical and cultural explanation for strategic choice, and strategic culture ultimately affects that strategic choice.¹

In *The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Culture* edited by Kerry Kartchner, Briana Bowen, and Jeannie Johnson, strategic culture is defined as a cultural, ideational arena with national security stakes. Events shape strategic culture, affecting ideas, emotional responses, behavioural patterns, etc. Strategic culture can be analysed by looking at a nation's traditions, values, habits, symbols, but also

¹ Alastair Ian Johnson, *Cultural realism. Strategic culture and grand strategy in Chinese history* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1–27.

at the way it persistently transmits certain ideas. Moreso, historical experience, a nation's geography, its political values can shape and limit the ideational milieu, predisposing its society and political elites towards certain actions. Fundamentally, strategic culture can be understood through common experiences and accepted narratives.² Of particular importance is Chapter 7, "The United States and NATO. Is there a Western strategic culture?" by Jeffrey Larsen. Larsen raises a few important points which are of considerable interest to this article. He argues that NATO's membership increase after the Cold War means the alliance has a draw to it, and that draw can be explained by Larsen's definition of western strategic culture, a set of norms and values that are, in any order: democracy, capitalism, individual liberty, the rule of law, and the rules-based international system. In this sense, for Larsen, the idea of "the West" is not geographic, instead it is more abstract, defined by the previously mentioned values, and it attracts nations outside a specific geographic zone, not only exemplified by the former Warsaw Pact countries, but also by the Indo-Pacific. Japan, South Korea, Australia, are not only countries that are compatible with these values, but they have also undergone considerable efforts to improve their ties with NATO. Coming back to Larsen's points, it is also important to note that a strategic culture is something deeper, more fundamental than a treaty or an agreement. This also means that it would require a much deeper shock for it to start to unravel. He lists the two "critical junctures" that NATO has faced in its post-Cold War history: the dissolution of the USSR in the early 1990s, and the re-emergence of Russia as a strategic rival in 2014. In this time, Larsen argues that a considerable development shows signs of taking place: the Eastern European nations that have joined NATO have begun to move away from the more transactional logic of their initial acceptance into the alliance (defence from a revanchist Russia) and began to absorb some of the more nuanced elements of western strategic culture. Nevertheless, to understand this point, the reader needs to be aware of the notion of strategic subcultures, particularly of the Europeanist and Atlanticist divide that exists within NATO.³

Chapter 14 of the same book is even more relevant, as it analyses British strategic culture.⁴ The author of the chapter raises a sensitive issue, that the Brexit vote, aside from being a notable development, could turn out to be a risky gamble, having the opposite effect from what the Leave campaign wanted: a United Kingdom increasingly prone to divisions and dissolution rather than an increasingly united country. Nevertheless, the author does outline three core tenets

² Kerry Kartchner, Briana Bowen, and Jeannie Johnson, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Strategic Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 3–17.

³ Jeffrey Larsen, "The United States and NATO: Is there a western strategic culture?" in *Routledge Handbook of Strategic Culture*, ed. Kerry Kartchner, Briana Bowen, and Jeannie Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2024), 91–106.

⁴ Alastair Finlan, "The Strategic Culture of the United Kingdom" in *Routledge Handbook of Strategic Culture*, ed. Kerry Kartchner, Briana Bowen, and Jeannie Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2024), 193–204.

of British strategic culture, all of them having ramifications for Romanian foreign policy as well. The first tenet is the “special relationship” between Britain and the United States. This topic has been long studied, and it can be argued that indeed, for Britain, the US holds a far more important role than it does for other western European countries. But how does that impact Romania? Conveniently, Romania also perceives its relationship with the US as being in many ways “different” than its other diplomatic relations. Both Romania and Britain can find common ground in their Atlanticism, whether it’s an agreement on how to approach the War on Terror of the George W. Bush administration, or whether it’s once again the similarity of norms and values that all three countries signal. Britain’s pro-Americanism has often found it at odds with many of its European allies, and in the case of Romania, this problem does not manifest itself. The second tenet of British strategic culture is represented by its nuclear deterrent, specifically, the idea that Britain is one of Europe’s three nuclear powers, along with France and Russia, and that gives it a different security role on the continent. For Romania, who has good relations with one nuclear power – France, – and cold relations with the other – Russia, – a cordial relationship with Britain, who is outside the EU but still a nuclear power, is logical and serves as an incentive for deeper security cooperation. Finally, the third tenet of British strategic culture is presented by its status as a sea power. This has been a highly valued principle of British foreign policy for centuries, and most geostrategic developments are considered by London with the footnote that its naval power can and has to be used as an asset. In Romania’s case, the country has an opening to the Black Sea, and since the 2000s it has been pursuing a foreign policy that advocates a growing role for NATO on its Black Sea coast. This aligns itself well with Britain’s sea power objectives, providing yet another opportunity for deeper security cooperation. As it can be seen, British strategic culture does not find itself in any major contradiction with the opportunities presented by Romania, on the contrary, there is considerable room for alignment.

It is easy to see on this backdrop why the idea of a comparison and analysis of Romania and Britain’s strategic cultures could be valuable. Both countries have faced their own important historical events that challenged their norms and values (the Romanian Revolution and Brexit). Both countries (Britain since the notions began to be formed, Romania re-adhering to them after 1989) uphold what Larsen has called “western strategic culture.” Moreso, both could be described as Atlanticist nations, which has considerable implications for the interplay of NATO’s own strategic subcultures. With these ideas in mind, the article aims to make its comparisons and analysis, concluding that Romania has essentially joined the western strategic culture, moving past a transactional logic, resisting stress tests provided not only by its own history, but also by Britain’s. The endurance showcased by both reinforces the existence of a western strategic culture especially at a time when there is yet another apparent crisis of confidence in American leadership within NATO and in the world.

The 1990s: alignment of norms and values

The end of the Ceausescu regime raised a new prospect for Romanian foreign policy: the possibility to move away from the Soviet sphere of influence and establish closer ties with the west. One problem at hand concerned norms and values. After half a century marked by the Cold War, Britain was sceptical of Romania's capability to adhere to values espoused by western countries. Nevertheless, a review of discussions and debates within Britain at the time demonstrate that there was an active, committed effort to ensure that post-communist Romania would be transformed into a country well-suited for integration with key European institutions like the European Union. This would also pave the way for an improvement in the country's ties with NATO, establishing the beginnings of British–Romanian security cooperation.

In the years following the 1989 Revolution, Romania was in dire need of international support. The United Kingdom counts itself among the countries that contributed consistently to Romania's socio-economic recovery. As early as January 1990, the House of Commons was calling for "a more appropriately generous and comprehensive aid plan to be designed for the newly democratised countries of eastern Europe."⁵ Back then, one notable worry for Britain was represented by the prospect of a united Germany and the questions raised by its own potential geostrategic alignments. Given London's fears concerning the uncertainty brought about German unification, the Commons concluded that the Eastern European countries needed to be integrated into the European Community.⁶ The process of normative alignment was shaky at first. The Ceausescu regime had been defeated, but the emerging National Salvation Front (FSN) was viewed with suspicion by the British parliament. The initial impression was that for all its faults, the FSN was an improvement over the Ceausescu regime, and it would begin paving the path that would become Romania's road to a market economy.⁷ There were fears that the entire region would fall to inter-ethnic conflicts and, in Romania's case, much attention was paid to ensuring there were no major tensions between ethnic Romanians and the country's Hungarian minority. The Commons remained optimistic that despite these fears, it would only be a matter of time until Romania would join the European Community.⁸ Freedom of the press, strengthening

⁵ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 164, cols. 932–933 (January 10, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1990-01-10/debates/89dd62cd-476f-43db-9b80-6886e7444af7/EasternEurope?highlight=romania#contribution-f825730c-ea20-4f7e-b008-8591edc2d675>.

⁶ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 514, cols. 657–676 (January 17, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1990-01-17/debates/924fe717-1c50-4e51-a8c9-550d6be47a1a/GermanyUnificationProspect?highlight=romania#contribution-78252154-7747-4d59-bce4-4e506f0c23fc>.

⁷ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 514, cols. 636–637 (January 17, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1990-01-17/debates/906e1285-18f0-4932-9551-eee0fced3be2/RomaniaHumanRights?highlight=romania#contribution-44f46334-837c-4659-8e21-023542e9c342>.

⁸ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 167, cols. 1108–1142 (February 22, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1990-02-22/debates/51ff7649-5a11-4036-aafe-50511b737610/East-WestRelations?highlight=romania#contribution-9101aaba-4bb9-4bfa-961a-0c8fda3fb8d2>.

Romania's institutions, and ensuring more resources for the country's smaller parties also featured heavily on Britain's agenda, marking yet another example of a push for normative alignment.⁹ The Commons' efforts were mirrored by the House of Lords, who asked for a Marshall Plan-type program for Romania, which they considered had much higher social problems than the other new democracies in the region. Some Lords were sceptical about the forces driving Romania's Revolution, as well as about the country's ability to pursue the necessary economic and political reforms, nevertheless, the support was still there.¹⁰

The June 1990 Mineriad, in which protesters of the FSN government had clashed with coal miners from the Jiu Valley brought to Bucharest by the Iliescu government specifically to silence them represented the first notable hurdle in the evolving post-communist British-Romanian relationship. Initial opinions in London were mixed, with the British government condemning the Romanian government for crushing peaceful dissent, although some voices in Parliament were suspicious of the student protestors as well. The prevailing sentiment was that Romania clearly lagged Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia in terms of democratisation, but despite this negative development, the British government decided not to abandon hope or support for Romania's authorities, still believing in progress and future normative alignment.¹¹ A quote from MP Waldegrave added detail: "we should be building and maintaining contacts, but we should not yet be offering the prizes of economic and other support that we have made conditional, for the other countries of eastern and central Europe, on progress towards law, free markets and genuine democracy."¹² Further signs of a temporary halt to British economic reform in light of the mineriad was seen in July 1990, as MP Chalker argued: "following the disgraceful events in Bucharest on June 13 and 14, we vigorously supported the decisions not to proceed with the EC's proposed trade and co-operation agreement with Romania and not to invite Romania to the meeting of the G24 Foreign Ministers on July 4. I believe that to be absolutely right. But if we see evidence of moves towards genuine democracy and reform, including full rights for opposition parties and movements, we shall, of course, be prepared to

⁹ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 167, cols. 1244–1250 (February 23, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1990-02-23/debates/4a5abfec-d276-4690-9e5b-6a4ed5514490/Romania?highlight=romania#contribution-e19e7170-d647-4c71-840d-b40eafe1d14d>.

¹⁰ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 517, cols. 318–369 (March 21, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1990-03-21/debates/a21a5b47-164f-48d1-a09b-1bb356f77496/EasternEuropeAndTheSovietUnion?highlight=romania#contribution-5f37dc53-23eb-4c1c-bd7b-08e5b5903191>.

¹¹ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 175, cols. 587–594 (June 28, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1990-06-28/debates/0b188400-8804-4d6a-b72a-26d29a1f0b98/Romania?highlight=romania#contribution-a8999dff-d07c-43c8-ab86-7c6711c77b11>.

¹² *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 176, cols. 305–306 (July 11, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1990-07-11/debates/e882000d-b057-4f3f-af93-d3a003400eba/Romania?highlight=romania#contribution-bee950f3-e80d-43f1-a4e4-8c618c3ce780>.

reconsider.”¹³ By the end of 1990, the opinion in Westminster softened, with MPs arguing that in spite of the mineriad, Romania’s government had helped western causes vis-à-vis UN sanctions concerning trade in the Gulf area and allowed the US navy to rest in the Black Sea, a first for NATO forces in Warsaw Pact territory. Consensus, once again, revolved around the impression that countries from southeast Europe were adjusting to western norms and values slower, but still, progress was observable.¹⁴ The June mineriad was the worst of the 1990s mineriads, two more taking place in January and February, and one more in September 1991. There would be two more mineriads in 1999, and by the beginning of the 2000s the practice would come to a halt, partly due to a return to power of Ion Iliescu, partly due to the realisation by Romanian political elites that the country’s path to the EU and NATO would be severely hindered if such practices were to continue.

By 1993, Romania’s European path was moving ahead slowly but steadily. In October 1993, Romania joined the Council of Europe. On the other hand, the Soviet coup attempt of 1991, along with the self-coup of 1993 had worried Britain that Russia’s path to democracy was halting. On this backdrop, the UK accelerated its pursuit of defence agreements with Eastern European countries, Romania among them.¹⁵ By 1994, market liberalization was well on its way, and Westminster discussed the progress of agrarian reforms in Transylvania.¹⁶ It can be argued that Britain was devoted to the cause of ensuring Romania transitioned to a market economy. Moreso, in 1996 the House of Lords debated the impact of EU enlargement, concluding that adding Romania and Bulgaria to the union would provide the Balkans with much-needed stability. The Lords expected France and Greece to lobby for this, and given Britain’s assumed responsibility for Malta and Cyprus, these points would carry considerable weight.¹⁷ In September 1996, Romania and Hungary signed a Friendship Treaty. This agreement was applauded

¹³ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 177, cols. 711–718 (July 26, 1990), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1990-07-26/debates/9d615ec3-c2d9-484d-83d9-6dc90ba2703f/EasternEurope?highlight=romania#contribution-7115beee-91fa-4462-a268-fa43cd86b859>.

¹⁴ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 178, cols. 456–475 (October 24, 1990), [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1990-10-24/debates/d8860f40-3492-4c98-b081-b05e7ce15b6c/CentralAndEasternEurope\(EcAid\)?highlight=romania#contribution-60635021-fade-4929-bc3f-d96ce8594dc9](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1990-10-24/debates/d8860f40-3492-4c98-b081-b05e7ce15b6c/CentralAndEasternEurope(EcAid)?highlight=romania#contribution-60635021-fade-4929-bc3f-d96ce8594dc9).

¹⁵ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 230, col. 29 (October 18, 1993), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1993-10-18/debates/00e0e205-c15b-40a1-83a5-58ab7ad8f6bf/StatementOnTheDefenceEstimates?highlight=romania#contribution-0917569d-fbe5-445d-b835-f6bdb56a61>.

¹⁶ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 557, cols. 714–763 (October 10, 1994), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1994-10-10/debates/5c38f334-4e93-46f9-9175-4bffa4730e71/EuropeAgreementsEccReport?highlight=romania#contribution-393a4740-0e4f-4476-baae-5bd97ac700da>.

¹⁷ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 570, cols. 852–886 (March 13, 1996), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1996-03-13/debates/6a540d7b-05e1-4d4d-abbe-8ca4552e7096/EuropeanUnionEnlargementProposals?highlight=romania#contribution-af210579-29eb-4b99-b5d5-2156ff04d22f>.

by Britain, who saw it as a stabilizing factor, reducing the risks of inter-ethnic conflicts in Romania. The agreement paved the way for Westminster to seriously consider Romania having a role in NATO.¹⁸ This was exemplified by the words of Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, who claimed “we are helping Romania to prepare herself for European Union membership as and when she is ready. We are also encouraging Romania to take full advantage of the opportunities for closer involvement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.”¹⁹ In another Lords discussion at the end of 1997, the Baroness added: “if Romania continues to make economic and political progress it will be an excellent candidate for any future enlargement. But enhancing the security of Europe as a whole will also be part of that decision. The credentials of individual countries are certainly part of the picture. It will also be a question of how the accession of individual countries affects the security of NATO as a whole.”²⁰ Romania was refused entry to NATO in 1996, nevertheless, Westminster believed the country would make a good ally in the future, noting that there was strong French support for Romania, in spite of the fact that many British politicians did not fully understand why France believed so strongly that Romania was a Francophone country.²¹ Another matter that contributed to NATO’s reluctance concerning Romania might have been the impression that the country was not capable yet to act as both a provider and beneficiary of security within NATO, as MP Donald Anderson of Swansea East said: “I accept that the new countries must be providers as well as consumers of security in the frieze. However, we must look long and bold. As with the European Union, we must take risks by investing in democracy and the changes that have come about in other countries, in particular in the civilian control of the military, as NATO helps within their internal structures and with interoperability with and military deployments for the ‘Partnership for Peace’ and other imaginative structures.”²² Romania and Bulgaria had already been supporting NATO efforts in its conflict with Kosovo, especially concerning navigation on the Danube.²³

¹⁸ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 282, cols. 612–688 (October 15, 1996), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1996-10-15/debates/2cfd5496-9949-4124-8499-6d0c52616eb7/DefenceEstimates?highlight=romania#contribution-4340b464-071d-4e29-8ddd-07271299b932>.

¹⁹ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 581, cols. 720–722 (July 10, 1997), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1997-07-10/debates/60c5a2f3-9917-46d5-bf86-06c0a31178b6/Romania?highlight=romania#contribution-0ad307d6-b901-4a9e-9bb2-01aa17331704>.

²⁰ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 583, cols. 1173–1175 (December 1, 1997), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1997-12-01/debates/b840b03d-1bd4-4890-82da-0fa30c9d088d/RomaniaNatoMembership?highlight=romania#contribution-7ee2997e-aeae-4100-9f22-b4aa96e9a122>.

²¹ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 316, cols. 717–752 (July 17, 1998), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1998-07-17/debates/69faa914-fe97-4bc7-a045-b1052f148848/NatoEnlargement?highlight=romania#contribution-7a92de51-efc-455e-beb0-de86d44503c9>.

²² *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 321, cols. 440–512 (November 27, 1998), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1998-11-27/debates/0478a389-cb8c-480f-bfd9-0da2dfb5c945/ForeignAffairsAndDefence?highlight=romania#contribution-da87ca0f-70d9-43ff-91c3-032602c30837>.

²³ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 340, cols. 314–404 (December 1, 1999), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1999-12-01/debates/8d0ccf5e-7220-4f5e-9be4-99a726ad9601/EuropeanUnion?highlight=romania#contribution-64f8699c-8527-4884-afba-d9bbdf3dfb5>.

By 1998, Britain had become convinced that Romania was a both a country that badly needed investment and could prove itself to be a considerable economic asset within the EU. The best way of removing the iron gate was to bring the poorer countries of Eastern Europe closer to western European economies, there was strong belief in London that Romania's prosperity would translate in a net benefit for Britain as well.²⁴ Baroness Amos, in a discussion in the House of Lords, contextualised the extent of Britain's financial effort in aiding Romania: "since 1991, we have provided £30 million in terms of bilateral assistance to Romania. We have introduced a range of projects, including development management training centres and assistance for the decentralisation and reform of child welfare services. We are currently preparing a country strategy paper to enable Romania successfully to transfer to a pluralist democracy with well-regulated markets."²⁵

To conclude this section, the 1990s were a tumultuous period for Romania, but the developments of this decade have enabled the alignment of British and Romanian strategic cultures in three areas: firstly, Romania's path to democratisation began, and was supported and encouraged by Britain. This is logical, Britain having acted under the belief that like-minded democracies can cooperate better than democracies and autocracies or hybrid regimes. Secondly, Romania transitioned to a market economy. Again, Britain has supported many of Romania's reforms, with the goal of enabling trade between the two countries. Finally, Britain began supporting Romania's path to the EU and NATO due to an emerging security consensus in London: Romania needed to be aligned with the west to stabilise the Balkans, prevent ethnic conflicts with its neighbour Hungary, and facilitate military cooperation with the UK, especially given Romania's access to the Black Sea. British worries about the German and Russian geostrategic uncertainty also played a role in ensuring Romania would be brought closer to the UK-backed western alliance. What is also notable is that when Romania's government encountered drawbacks, giving in to its old autocratic tendencies, such as the mineriads of the 1990s, the British government demonstrated a high degree of understanding, maintaining hope that Romania's reforms would continue despite the apparent backsliding. This might have been due to the British conviction that Romania, like many other nations in the Balkans, was aligning itself with the west at a slower pace than the countries of the Visegrad group (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia), but still, this belief in the delayed yet still notable progress of Romania proved a worthwhile investment. By the early 2000s, Romania and Britain had reached a

²⁴ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 318, cols. 146–147 (October 27, 1998), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1998-10-27/debates/6cb83948-5ba4-40ed-b3a1-3219385c5484/EuropeanUnionEnlargement?highlight=romania#contribution-0e8b0ae7-fc0e-47f1-bb0f-0eb4e810261c>.

²⁵ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 600, cols. 788–790 (May 6, 1999), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1999-05-06/debates/04c7127b-2aa6-485f-ae4d-f763b85d01a3/RomaniaAndBulgariaEffectOfYugoslavConflict?highlight=romania#contribution-75ada294-e3c7-4d3e-a878-53c4a38944ee>.

decent level of normative, economic, strategic alignment. From here onward, the issue at hand was how to consolidate and develop this alignment.

The 2000s: The emergence of the divide between security and community

Romania joined NATO in 2004, and the EU in 2007. Britain had supported its road to both. What followed was a slight separation between the security aspect of the relationship and Britain's idea of its place in the European community. Romania and Britain found it quite easy to cooperate as NATO allies, both in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, however, Britain's relationship with the EU would begin to fundamentally change, as London believed there was too much integration, and it was losing sovereignty to Brussels. Frictions with Romania existed as well, given that the Romanian expat community in Britain began to increase at an accelerated pace, a development that was exploited to a certain extent by some British politicians, despite the strains provided by the development being nonetheless serious. This security–community divide would prove to be even deeper in the decade that followed.

Calls were being made to bring Romania in NATO since the late 1990s, when the Earl of Carlisle in the Lords argued that Romania had made “gigantic strides” in adapting its defence posture to NATO requirements, claiming “we need their manpower, and they need our mutual security.”²⁶ A good understanding of how Britain conceptualised Romania's role in NATO can be inferred from Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech to the Romanian Chamber of Deputies on May 4, 1999. The first British Prime Minister to address the Romanian Parliament, Blair touched on the war in Kosovo and Romania's security future. He argued that the instability of the Balkans posed a security threat to both NATO and Romania. Romania opening its airspace for NATO, accepting refugees, economically stifling Serbia, all were viewed as examples of Romania contributing to NATO's objectives. Blair presented Romania and Britain as democracies with shared values such as support for human dignity and freedom. He argued that the time had come for both old and new democracies to make a common front and take a stand, informing the Romanian Parliament that the door to NATO was open, and Britain would help Romania join. He argued that Romania had become a stabilising force in its region.²⁷ Blair's speech emphasised the common ground in Romanian and British strategic cultures when it comes to both security and norms and values. His argument that Romania had the possibility of being a stabilising force in southeast Europe underlined a

²⁶ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 604, cols. 1047–1062 (July 21, 1999), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1999-07-21/debates/03b648fe-7cca-4c6e-b360-73b318eb96/WesternEuropeanUnion?highlight=romania#contribution-203e26e8-a9f6-404c-9141-e88a38888668>.

²⁷ Camera Deputaţilor, “Alocuţiunea domnului Tony Blair, primul-ministru al Regatului Unit al Marii Britanii și Irlandei de Nord, rostită în plenul celor două Camere ale Parlamentului României,” May 4, 1999, <https://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno2015.stenograma?ids=5440&idm=1&idl=1>.

concept that Romanian security would hold very dear in the decades that followed. It can be argued that from this point forward, Romania and Britain had become fundamentally intertwined in matters of security, a relationship that would resist Brexit, and adapt quickly to future shocks such as the wars in the Middle East or Ukraine.

The beginning of the third term of President Ion Iliescu in 2000 was met with optimism by Westminster, fuelled largely by the belief that the Romanian government would adhere to the 1993 Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. These included: institutional stability, guaranteeing democracy, rule of law, human and minority rights. Romania's evolving market economy added to the overall positive impression. The matters at hand in 2000 were twofold: Romania was viewed as a very poor country, and EU membership could fix that, and it was viewed as a country in a precarious region, security-wise, something that NATO membership could resolve. This was the rationale at work in Britain when it came to supporting Romania's development.²⁸ In 2002, Prime Minister Tony Blair argued that EU enlargement had been a "goal of successive British Governments. It was an historic obligation to offer membership to those nations that won their freedom after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their membership will establish a single market of some 500 million people. We hope that those 10 countries will be joined by Bulgaria and Romania no later than 2007."²⁹ The same year, Romania was formally invited to join NATO. In the words of Baroness Rawlings, these developments were "giant strides from an area that was often called 'the forgotten Europe' during the Cold War, [...] the Balkans are an integral part of our continent."³⁰

More details concerning Romania's value to NATO can be inferred by looking at the speeches of NATO's British Secretary General of the time, Lord Robertson. During a statement in Prague, in November 2002, where Romania, along with Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia were formally invited to join NATO, he made the claim that the new members weren't added to NATO just to improve the alliance's numbers. He argued that every new member needed to be a "producer of security" in face of the 21st century's new challenges.³¹ In a 2003 speech to the Romanian Parliament, he expanded on that idea. He argued that the

²⁸ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 620, cols. 792–817 (December 20, 2000), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2000-12-20/debates/65e509a4-b1e7-422e-8062-53b67fe37bcf/EuropeanEnlargement?highlight=romania#contribution-67d3dfa0-9a89-423c-8dcf-cb708c8a0723>.

²⁹ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 391, cols. 542–557 (October 28, 2002), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2002-10-28/debates/56b56548-351c-44f4-bc0f-43aa3f6b4329/EuropeanCouncil?highlight=romania#contribution-d0d3aa9d-5427-46d2-bc31-a8e7a267a946>.

³⁰ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 642, cols. 1054–1079 (January 8, 2003), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2003-01-08/debates/21303eb2-699a-4a20-b6ec-6335809e4661/Balkans?highlight=romania#contribution-071c0715-4f36-4719-bb54-6d5a434d2808>.

³¹ Lord Robertson, "Opening Statement by NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council with invitees," *NATO Speeches*, November 21, 2002, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021121q.htm>.

Prague summit was Romania's "integration into the Euro-Atlantic family of nations," helping to create a Europe "truly whole and free, united in peace, democracy and common values, from the Baltics to the Black Sea." Robertson laid out his vision for an offensive NATO, arguing that "NATO's forces should be prepared to go wherever they are needed, and to defend against threats from wherever they may come. This is a real break with the past. The end to decades of discussion as to whether NATO could or should operate 'out-of-area.'" This was said at the peak of NATO's involvement in Afghanistan, where Romania was contributing too. He urged Romania to continue to reform not only its military, but also its institutions, confident the country could play a growing role in NATO.³² This assertive approach mirrored the one laid out by Romania's Defence Minister Ioan Mircea Pascu in a November 2001 speech where he said that in light of the 9/11 terror attacks, Romania "has voluntarily decided to consider herself a 'de facto' NATO ally and accept full responsibility in fighting international terrorism." He argued that "NATO enlargement is even more relevant than before the 11th of September. If we need more coherence and better coordination in the fight against international terrorism, and I think we do, then NATO enlargement should remain a priority. And the more comprehensive and sooner will be, the better."³³ In a sense, Romania's membership in NATO at that point was very much a formality. Similarly, a speech in June 2003 in Madrid by Romania's Foreign Affairs Minister, Mircea Geoană argued that "the combined military and economic might of the United States and Europe, and a common determination to defend shared values are more indispensable than ever," and that Romania could be a key player in the fight against terrorism. He also added that "NATO is the key consultation forum that brings together North America and Europe. Romania as well as other new comers and credible partners, must strengthen this community of like-minded nations."³⁴ In 2004, NATO held a meeting in Poiana Braşov, Romania, and Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer spoke about the alliance's need for transformation, given new security threats. Scheffer argued that NATO's ability to deter rivals was diminishing, and the new reality for the alliance would be one where quick reaction to unexpected events was inevitable.³⁵ Thus, we can observe the emergence of a more offensive NATO, with Romania trying to act as

³² Lord Robertson, "Speech by NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson," *NATO Speeches*, March 3, 2003, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2003/s030303a.htm>.

³³ Ioan Mircea Pascu, "Address by H.E. Mr. Ioan Mircea Pascu, Minister of National Defense of Romania at the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in Defence Ministers session," *NATO Speeches*, December 19, 2001, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2001/s011219q.htm>.

³⁴ Mircea Geoană, "Speaking Notes for H.E. Mr. Mircea Geoană, Foreign Minister of Romania at the EAPC Meeting PANEL I: New threats to security and the role of Partnership in dealing with them," *NATO Speeches*, June 4, 2003, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2003/s030604i.htm>.

³⁵ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, "Opening statement by NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the Informal Meeting of Defence Ministers," *NATO Speeches*, October 13, 2004, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2004/s041013a.htm>.

a security provider and regional stabiliser. On this backdrop, Romania and Britain had signed in 2003 a strategic partnership, which aimed to formalise cooperation between the two countries in key domains considering Romania's impending acceptance into the EU.³⁶

With Romania's EU accession date approaching, a tonal shift started to emerge in the British press, marking one of the first signs of the security–community divide. The 2004 EU wave of enlargement had a profound impact on Britain, as the country saw a pronounced increase in the number of Eastern Europeans arriving to work. The surge in immigration from the EU led to some social unrest, and a prevailing sentiment of worry that would be further exploited by the press three years later, when Romania and Bulgaria were set to join the Union. The nature of the problem was summed up well by MP Keith Vaz of Leicester, who argued that “despite being conclusively wrong about the effects of the previous enlargement, tabloid journalists and right-wing commentators are saying that the stability of our society, the security of our welfare system and the success of our economy will be in grave danger unless we block the access of Romanians and Bulgarians to our labour market. There is simply no evidence to support that. The enlargement will have much less impact than the 2004 experience. Romania and Bulgaria have a much smaller combined population than the previous accession countries and have no well established links with the UK. Those who do wish to travel look instead to Mediterranean countries such as Italy or Spain as their first choice.”³⁷ The UK still maintained the belief that the EU could play a pivotal role in helping Romania develop economically, especially when it came to using EU funds to improve the livelihood of Romania's poorest regions, which were also some of the poorest regions in the EU back then.³⁸ Still, Britain's slow movement in coming to terms with the influx of people from Eastern Europe created frustrations in Westminster. The government's struggles in the early 2010s to estimate the number of workers from Romania and Bulgaria added to the sense of unease in Britain and fuelled the debate over leaving the EU due to the perceived inability to control its own borders.³⁹

To conclude the section, the 2000s marked a series of key developments: in 2004 and 2007, Romania would join two of the core organisations that Britain was

³⁶ Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, “Parteneriatul strategic dintre România și Regatul Unit al Marii Britanii și Irlandei de Nord,” March 2003, <https://www.mae.ro/node/55196>.

³⁷ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 450, cols. 280WH–288WH (October 18, 2006), [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2006-10-18/debates/06101847000002/BulgariaAndRomania\(EmploymentRights\)?highlight=romania#contribution-06101847000137](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2006-10-18/debates/06101847000002/BulgariaAndRomania(EmploymentRights)?highlight=romania#contribution-06101847000137).

³⁸ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 707, cols. 984–1008 (February 9, 2009), [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2009-02-09/debates/0902099000093/EURegionalPolicy\(EUCReport\)?highlight=romania#contribution-09020917000001](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2009-02-09/debates/0902099000093/EURegionalPolicy(EUCReport)?highlight=romania#contribution-09020917000001).

³⁹ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 554, cols. 203WH–210WH (December 4, 2012), [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2012-12-04/debates/12120444000001/Immigration\(RomaniaAndBulgaria\)?highlight=romania#contribution-12120444000018](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2012-12-04/debates/12120444000001/Immigration(RomaniaAndBulgaria)?highlight=romania#contribution-12120444000018).

a part of and would thus become a member of what could be called a western-aligned security and political architecture: NATO and the EU. Its joining of these organisations was also a culmination of the efforts by successive British governments to ensure that Romania would have access to both a path to economic growth, and the possibility to be a stabilising security force in southeast Europe. In this case, Romania's achievements were Britain's too. Nevertheless, the 2000s also begin to showcase the emergence of the security–community divide: very quickly after Romania joined the EU, Britain began its own process of re-assessing its membership in the Union, confronted with a growing discontent from its ideological right that claimed London was losing sovereignty to the EU. The challenge that would be posed by the decades that followed was whether the British tendency to look away from the EU would hurt its security and economic arrangements with Romania. It would turn out the answer to that question would be a resounding no.

The war in Ukraine, Brexit, and the future of British–Romanian relations

From the 2010s until the mid-2020s, the British-Romanian alliance would go through considerable stress tests. Firstly, the Russian annexation of Crimea and its subsequent invasion of Ukraine tested the strength of the security relationship. Romania borders Ukraine and perceives Russian aggression as a threat to its own security. Britain on the other hand is less exposed but has maintained at numerous moments in its history a certain scepticism concerning Russia's foreign policy intentions, and this conflict was no exception. The second test was represented by Brexit, where Britain had decided to leave the European Union following its 2016 referendum. By the time of Brexit, there was a notable Romanian diaspora in Britain, and the two countries were cooperating well enough through the EU. Leaving the Union meant Britain had to perform a soft reset of most of its diplomatic ties, Romania included. The ability to navigate the uncertainty provided by Brexit would prove essential to maintaining a good working relationship with Romania.

The invasion of Ukraine determined Britain to commit itself more strongly to the defence of NATO's eastern flank. In May 2014, the UK committed to “more air policing and naval missions, and deployment of additional military staff from allied nations to strengthen NATO's preparedness, training and exercises” as well as “AWACS reconnaissance flights over Poland and Romania.”⁴⁰ This would be the first move in long series of commitments that would underline the notion that

⁴⁰ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 579, cols. 537–554 (April 28, 2014), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2014-04-28/debates/1404282000001/Ukraine?highlight=romania#contribution-1404282000172>.

Britain had no interest in reducing its military presence in NATO's eastern flank. As of January 2017, the Lords reviewed Britain's forward presence as follows: "a reconnaissance squadron to the US battalion in Poland and leading NATO's very high readiness joint task force with up to 3,000 UK troops. Typhoon aircraft based in Romania will conduct southern air policing this summer, and we will deploy a Royal Navy ship to NATO's standing naval mine countermeasures group in the Baltic."⁴¹ The 2014 NATO summit in Wales marked the beginning of a series of changes to NATO's defence posture which would further enable Britain to consolidate its military presence in the alliance's eastern flank. The high readiness task force, air policing of the Baltic and Black sea skies, an increase in the number of British troops deployed to the enhanced forward presence, combined with better multi-national interoperability showcased not only Britain's contributions, but NATO's evolution to an alliance that would be less reactive and more proactive in ensuring it would be well-prepared to defend itself in case of aggression.⁴² The year 2018 marked the busiest year in terms of British–Romanian military exercises, many of them taking place in eastern Romania and its Black Sea coast. In this sense, the security relationship was not hindered at all by Brexit, and the war in Ukraine served as a catalyst for its development. More to this, Romanian politicians had made it clear to Britain that its exit from the EU would be best replaced by a strong bilateral relationship, something which was well received in London. MP Bob Blackman of Harrow East made it clear to the Commons that Romania's vulnerability to a Russian attack meant NATO and Britain had an obligation to stand by their strategic partner.⁴³ Many of Romania's concerns regarding the importance of the Black Sea to NATO's security planning were echoed by Britain.⁴⁴

In the years that followed, the security relationship developed at an accelerating pace. The two countries would sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2019, renewing and updating the one that was in place since 1996. The new MoU aimed at improving industrial developments, with cooperation in the realm of "defence intelligence, military medicine, health support services and

⁴¹ *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 778, cols. 968–970 (January 30, 2017), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-01-30/debates/OBD82E07-08D1-4688-88D7-7E87E5BAEBF1/NATOEasternFlank?highlight=romania#contribution-9EFEEE04-3DFB-4119-9925-6B10844834E0>.

⁴² *Hansard*, House of Lords, Debates vol. 778, cols. 1263–1276 (February 1, 2017), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-02-01/debates/7C21C454-BAB2-4159-8A44-13981DAE358A/NATOMemberStateSpending?highlight=romania#contribution-31D38F56-C59D-4F46-ADEF-091848FDDC58>.

⁴³ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 643, cols. 30WH–49WH (June 19, 2018), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-06-19/debates/90943B48-34F5-45D4-9D27-061F0A15FFD0/UK-RomanianRelations?highlight=romania#contribution-F27469FB-24A0-429A-BA98-0AD5A91D0223>.

⁴⁴ *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debates vol. 643, cols. 390–435 (20 June 2018), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-06-20/debates/D8B9C284-0C34-4743-B8C5-C2AD2046DD11/NATO?highlight=romania#contribution-E99E8EBF-C0B0-4888-B48B-D11BFB9FFDFD>.

developing green initiatives on defence estates.” The new MoU also underscored more cooperation in the Black Sea and Western Balkans, regions that are of high strategic importance to Romania.⁴⁵ In March 2023, the two signed a new Strategic Partnership, updating the existing one from 2003. The new partnership stressed their shared values, common membership of international organizations, as well as support for the “rules-based international order.” Point 4 had the two countries promising to strengthen both the transatlantic relationship through NATO, as well as increasing strategic resilience in the Black Sea. The partnership added the promise of renewed economic cooperation and presented the “over 1 million Romanians in the UK contributing to the UK’s economy and society” as a net positive. It was clear that the two weren’t willing to allow Brexit to stall the ongoing security and economic cooperation that had been taking place in the previous decades. The partnership also included the promise of Britain aiding Romania’s entry to the OECD, as well as cooperating within the Three Seas Initiative.⁴⁶ In October 2024, the two countries signed a new Defence Treaty. The focus was primarily on improving cooperation on Ukraine, but information sharing and better coordination between the countries’ forces were also among the objectives. The press release highlighted that Romania had sent military personnel to Britain to train over 45,000 Ukrainian recruits in the UK. The treaty also established a joint defence committee, which would allow the two to better organise themselves within NATO.⁴⁷

Exiting the EU meant the UK needed to reset most of its diplomatic agreements, however, the post-Brexit strategy was much closer to one of re-engagement with the EU. The result of four years of negotiations, from the referendum in 2016 to the official exit in 2020, was a new UK–EU trade agreement that ensued zero tariffs on many goods, improved environmental protection for both sides, joint management of fish stocks in the EU and UK (fisheries being a very contentious issue during negotiations), the transport access was not the same as what the single market offered but efforts were made to ensure a level playing field, energy ties were maintained, and the UK gave guarantees that it would ensure the rights of millions of EU citizens living in Britain. The EU did the same for UK citizens. Britain also managed to secure membership in many flagship EU

⁴⁵ UK Parliament, House of Lords, “Defence Cooperation Agreements with Romania and Australia,” <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5901/ldselect/ldintagr/85/8504.htm>.

⁴⁶ Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, “Joint statement on the Romanian-British Strategic Partnership, March 2023,” March 23, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/romanian-british-strategic-partnership-joint-statement-2023/joint-statement-on-the-romanian-british-strategic-partnership-march-2023>.

⁴⁷ Rt. Hon. John Healy MP, Ministry of Defence, “New Defence treaty with Romania deepens relations and supports collective security,” November 13, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-defence-treaty-with-romania-deepens-relations-and-supports-collective-security>.

funding programs, such as Horizon Europe in the decade following Brexit.⁴⁸ Moreso, the July 2024 UK General Election saw the end of 14 years of government by the Conservative Party. The winning Labour Party, under new PM Keir Starmer, decided to pursue a policy of closer alignment with the EU, seeking an “economic reset” and improved trade relations. The new government argued that the years of negotiation over Brexit had damaged the relationship between the UK and EU, and a softer, more constructive tone was needed. Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves claimed she wanted to see a “business-like” relationship emerge, given that Britain and the EU ultimately face very similar challenges.⁴⁹ As for Romania, these developments would be very beneficial. They meant that Brexit had concluded with considerable protections for the large Romanian diaspora in Britain and ensured that economic ties with London would not just continue through the EU, but they could also develop bilaterally as well. As recent as 2024, the British Embassy and the British–Romanian Chamber of Commerce held an event in London that heralded the signing of double taxation agreement between the UK and Romania, which would facilitate British investments in Romania. Britain’s status as a top investor in Romania post-Brexit did not seem to diminish.⁵⁰

Conclusion

From the fall of the Ceausescu regime, Britain had supported Romania’s economic development, as well as its security consolidation. Over three decades and a half, Britain and Romania aligned their strategic cultures, and this process has endured considerable security and economic shocks. Romania’s democracy in the 1990s was fragile, and when the British government was confronted with clear examples of democratic backsliding, such as the mineriads, it chose a cautious approach, a carrots and sticks strategy that eventually paid off, since Romania’s democratic backsliding proved to be temporary and the country resumed a general trend of slow but stable progress in terms of democratic reforms. Britain saw in Romania a security ally, a potential NATO asset before even being part of NATO, as proven by Romania’s support for the alliance during the war in Kosovo.

⁴⁸ Petre Barac, “EU, UK reach Brexit agreement, will continue ‘cooperation in areas of mutual interest,’” *The Diplomat Bucharest*, December 28, 2020, <https://www.thediplomat.ro/2023/07/11/romanian-british-chamber-of-commerce-brcc-requests-the-modernization-of-the-double-taxation-convention-between-romania-and-great-britain-in-the-context-of-brexit/>.

⁴⁹ Mark Sweeney and Phillip Inman, “Reeves to pledge closer EU ties in pivot from post-Brexit ‘division and chaos,’” *The Guardian*, December 9, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/dec/09/reeves-to-pledge-closer-eu-ties-in-pivot-from-post-brexit-division-and-chaos>.

⁵⁰ “Romania and Great Britain strengthen partnerships through strategic investment dialogue,” *Business Forum*, November 20, 2024, <https://www.businessforum.ro/economy/20241120/romania-and-great-britain-strengthen-partnerships-through-strategic-investment-dialogue-1081>.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, coupled with Romania's 2004 entry into NATO marked the beginning of a gradual process of security alignment. The war in Ukraine further underlined the strategic value of Romania in southeast Europe, incentivising Britain to commit troops, improve cooperation with Bucharest and ensure that NATO's eastern flank is strengthened in a balanced, sustainable manner. It should also be noted that despite Britain's emerging scepticism towards the EU, it has maintained a pro-American foreign policy orientation. In this case, the fact that Romania's own foreign policy prioritised alignment with the US has reduced the risk of tensions with Britain and made the cooperation between Bucharest and London easier. Throughout the 2000s, Romania has also advanced the idea of the Black Sea as a key security region of NATO, and Britain would be receptive to this, because it considers itself a naval power, and it sees an opportunity to remain relevant in European security by contributing more to NATO's naval security. All in all, it can be argued that British–Romanian relations have managed to overcome the risks of division prompted by both countries' domestic grievances and struggles. The key driver of this endurance would be the thriving security relationship.

Finally, Brexit could have turned into a considerable economic shock, the UK leaving the EU running the risk of a ripple effect that would affect, among others, Romania. That was not the case. On the contrary, the British post-Brexit governments invested considerable efforts to ensure that there would be minimal economic disruption, and the negotiations resulted in more good news provided by the strengthening of the immigration status of EU citizens in Britain and vice versa. Britain was thus free from the EU in the areas of security, foreign policy and defence, exactly where it was already benefitting from a developing relationship with Romania. The war in Ukraine has also consolidated the idea that NATO is evolving into the *de facto* security alliance for the EU, thus minimising potential tensions and disagreements between Brussels, London, and Bucharest. The shared norms and values that Tony Blair proclaimed the two countries benefit from in the 1990s are still upheld. The trade relationship between the two continues to grow. It can thus be argued that Romania and Britain, despite the security–community divide, have seen an alignment of their strategic cultures, and are adapting to a position where they both can confront growing challenges with increasing confidence.