

Romania is ready to become a more prominent EU member

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Opinion

A decade after joining the EU, Romania is seeking to become a more prominent member, writes Victor Negrescu.



Victor Negrescu | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

This year, 1 January was a special anniversary for Romanians: 10 years as EU citizens. For other members, the status of EU citizenship seems, at times, to be taken for granted. But for many Romanians, especially from my generation, the accession to the continent's most significant political community remains a major landmark.

So important, in fact, that it marks a clear division in our political past, in a sense, between what was before, and what has happened since accession.

Romania started its journey as a member of the EU with unbridled expectations: democratisation,

development, an increase in living standards and prosperity.

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It did not come easy: the reforms enacted to prepare the country for EU membership were a difficult experience for Romania and its citizens, particularly as the country also had to deal with the economic effects of the transition from communism to democracy.

The European project was regarded with optimism, as a major achievement in terms of cooperation and building a political and social model of integration.

Romania's transformation into the open and democratic society many of us expected has been a success. Romania has become a true democracy and, despite being painfully slow, the economic advances are encouraging.

It is perhaps for these reasons that anti-EU movements have not managed to gain a foothold on the Romanian political scene.

The transformation of Romania is also the achievement of the European project, in terms of its capacity to foster democratisation and economic development.

What are our main challenges now? Reducing inequalities (internally and in comparison with other EU member states), bringing back our workforce from abroad, gaining a stronger voice in the EU - these are priorities for the next decade.

While the freedom to access the European labour market meant, for millions of Romanians, the chance to increase their families' living standards, this left our economy with a depleted labour force. Romania has to work hard to create the best conditions for bringing back its doctors, ICT specialists, teachers and engineers, its agriculture and construction workers.

Strong policies need to be developed in order to turn recent economic growth into a tangible increase in living standards for all citizens. Creating more chances for our youth, investing more in education and health, giving a special focus to significant fields like ICT are essential directions for social and economic development.

The current cabinet led by social democrats has acknowledged these necessities and has included targeted measures in its programme, which will hopefully inspire substantial and durable changes. This progressive vision also guarantees that Romania will remain firmly part of the anti-austerity bloc.

Furthermore, after a decade within the European institutional system, Romania's voice needs to become stronger and clearer.

The future presidency of the European Council in 2019 is a tremendous opportunity for our country to prove that it has mastered such duties associated with EU member status, and also to help manage,

in a constructive manner, important transformations such as Brexit. Assuming regional leadership should also be part of our future. Our new challenge is a new transition: from a 'new' to a 'prominent' member of the EU.

Romania will seek to play a bigger role in the EU, promoting a stronger, but also a fairer EU where everyone is treated equally, while defending the cohesion policy and fighting against a two-speed Europe.

About the author

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