Romania is in the final stage of its preparation to become a member of the European Union; EU accession is the country’s priority in foreign policy. The present Romanian government takes most seriously the terms and conditions set forth by the EU and is busy making sure that the targets are met in time for Brussels to admit Romania as a full member on January 1, 2007, as scheduled. This membership will not only strengthen further the security warranty provided to us by NATO; it will also speed up Romania’s economic growth, social welfare, and overall modernization.

The foreign policy of today’s Romanian government also focuses on strengthening the country’s ties with the United States (and Great Britain and, for a different reason, the Republic of Moldova). The official visit paid by President Traian Basescu to Washington earlier this year highlighted Romania’s close partnership with the United States. President George W. Bush referred to Romania as a “special ally” and valued its contribution to the struggle against terror and to the advance of democracy.

In turn, Romania highly values the US role as the leader and champion of the democratic world. Both before and after March 29, 2004, when it was admitted into NATO, Romania has been a loyal and steadfast ally of the United States in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other war theaters, in the struggle against terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and organized crime, and in endeavors to spread human rights and democratic freedoms. Reintegration with the European and Euroatlantic communities has been the aspiration of new Romania and the strategic target of its foreign policy all along. Romanians have always felt they belonged to these communities because of shared history and traditions and similar values and principles. Consequently, we have followed the paths to NATO and EU membership simultaneously, in a balanced way.

That balanced approach has brought us to a better understanding of our new challenges and has enriched our perspective and sense of values. Furthermore, such new challenges give us a strong incentive to continue making changes and improving economic and social structures in our country.

The NATO and EU enlargements have pushed the easternmost frontier of the democratic community to the Western shores of the Black Sea. Romania has now become a sentry on this last frontier of the democratic world.

The Black Sea region at present is the stage for important political and social developments. The democratic “orange spirit” has taken hold in several countries in the area; it brought the establishment of democratic governments in Georgia and the Ukraine, and it is on the upswing in the Republic of Moldova, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan. One could notice now that this is a most favorable time for democracy in the area. The democratic community should help advance this process—by, for instance, combatting illicit arms sales, organized crime, and terrorism that make it much harder to resolve “frozen conflicts” involving the Transdnistrian breakaway region of Moldova, the Armenian–Azerbaijani strife over Nagorno Karabakh, the Russian–Chechen war, or the Ossetia–Ingushetia conflict.
The Black Sea and Caucasus area, the contact point of three continents, is a transport route that already carries 50 per cent and will soon carry 75 per cent of Europe’s oil and gas supply. It is therefore of utmost importance for the European and Euroatlantic communities. American and European interests fully meet here. US–EU cooperation in facing the challenges, including both the good-neighbor policy of the EU toward countries east and south of its borders and the planned US military facilities in Romania and Bulgaria, is to be welcomed.

Romania believes it has a strong moral and political duty to be an anchor country along this frontier of the democratic community and to act for the advance of democracy and freedom in neighboring zones like the Black Sea area and the Western Balkans. Promoting security, democracy, and stability in our neighborhood is a priority for Romania. That is one more reason for Romanian foreign policy to continue to balance its close relationships with the United States and the European Union.

Romania’s New Black Sea Strategy
The Black Sea region represents one of the basic priorities of Romania’s foreign policy. There are many reasons for this: the geostrategic position of Romania, a riparian country on the Danube River and the Black Sea, in the vicinity of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Central Asia-regions of growing importance in the global political environment; the radical changes in various Black Sea states; the economic potential of the region, especially in energy resources; the diversity of cultural, religious, and social traditions; and the existence in the region of several contentious problems. In this region asymmetrical risks, such as terrorism, organized crime, and illegal trafficking of weapons, drugs, and human beings must be counteracted.

At the same time, the frozen conflicts involving Transdnistria, South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabach, and the Abkhazian region in Georgia require solutions as soon as possible. The European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and NATO should play a growing role by promoting a security dimension in their policies toward eastern neighbors, focusing especially on crisis management, post-conflict reconstruction, and democratic development. Romania, together with other states, is ready to provide to interested countries of this region its own experience in the fields of economic reforms, institutional renewal, good governance, reform of military forces, and consolidation of civil society.

In the economic field, Romania has an interest in further cooperation with Black Sea and EU member states to extend toward the Caucasus and Central Asia the benefits of transportation facilities, such as the Constantza Seaport Terminal or the Danube-Black Sea Channel. As a member of the Development Center of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Security and of the Southeast European Cooperation Process, Romania is well placed to facilitate implementation of energy projects in the Black Sea region and Southeastern Europe. In the long term our country could offer its facilities to help establish a Southeast European integrated energy market.
As a founding member of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Romania has already played an active role in promoting action-oriented projects in transport, energy, communications, trade, agriculture, and environmental protection. In its 13 years of existence, the BSEC countries have succeeded in setting up a broad legal framework for fruitful cooperation in various fields, though the lack of financial and logistical resources remains a serious obstacle. The priorities of this regional organization for economic cooperation need to be reevaluated to stimulate the initiatives of Member States and adapt the BSEC to European and global economic trends. In the near future the boundaries of the enlarged Europe will cover a significant part of the BSEC region, and the EU will become a major Black Sea actor. In the BSEC framework, the Project Development Fund has recently become operational, and this will help stimulate the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, and other economic and financial institutions to develop more dynamic cooperation with the BSEC. In November Romania will assume the BSEC presidency for a six-month term. It will seek to enhance the action-oriented dialog with the European Union in BSEC economic activities and with the EU and NATO in security issues; to ensure implementation of economic projects that have already been approved by the BSEC; and to restructure and increase the effectiveness of the BSEC.

As a priority of its foreign policy, Romania will encourage and assist the Republic of Moldova on its way toward European and Euroatlantic integration and will spare no efforts to contribute to the resolution of the Transdniestrian conflict, which is currently a hotbed of insecurity not only for neighboring countries, but for the whole Euroatlantic community.

We have already undertaken steps to relaunch bilateral relations with Ukraine in the framework of a pragmatic and enhanced partnership, in order to find solutions to sensitive issues on the common agenda and to cooperate in positive development in the Black Sea region. We are also determined to build a new relationship with the Russian Federation, a key actor in the Black Sea basin, based on a pragmatic partnership that is consistent with the overall principles and framework of NATO-Russian cooperation and the EU-Russian strategic partnership. Elsewhere in the South Caucasus Romania aims, in cooperation with our NATO and EU partners, to help Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia resolve their conflicts and cope with other threats to their security and stability, and to put into practice the Euroatlantic values of democracy, rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, free entrepreneurship, and liberalization of foreign trade.

Romania on the Road to EU Membership
After concluding EU accession negotiations last December, we received the European Parliament’s assent to our application for membership and signed the accession treaty in April 2005. This confirms EU recognition of our current level of preparedness for accession, as well as of Romania’s resolve and ability to fulfill the membership requirements by January 2007. At the same time, we are well aware of the challenges in the difficult period ahead of us. We are fully determined to carry on with implementing our commitments by
each of the set deadlines. Great anticipation of accession in 2007 pervades all levels of Romanian society, and itself constitutes a guarantee that we will be adequately prepared by that time to assume all our responsibilities as an EU member state. The political and procedural framework for Romania’s accession is now firmly in place, and the internal preparations that must still be undertaken are also very clear and are being closely monitored.

The accession treaty includes the famous and often-discussed “specific safeguard clause,” which could trigger a postponement of the entry date by one year if either Romania or Bulgaria is “manifestly unprepared to meet the requirements of membership by 1 January 2007.” This safeguard clause is all too frequently and somewhat fallaciously referred to as a sign of skepticism by our European partners about our capacity to fulfill the commitments made during the accession process. I regard it instead as something of a rather technical nature, a mechanism that gives the European institutions an additional guarantee that Romania will be satisfactorily prepared by the time it joins the Union. In our actions our government is determined to allay any concerns and keep this no more than a theoretical and hypothetical clause.

Balancing ties with the United States and the European Union

For us, as for all Europeans, the transatlantic dialog is of paramount importance. We intend to promote a strengthened European Union–United States relationship for the benefit of a strong Europe that is seen as a real and equal partner of the US in promoting global security. We seek to enhance the EU approach on the main issues of the transatlantic agenda, based on close consultations with our European partners. We aim to deepen transatlantic relations further, thus increasing the security and stability in Europe’s neighboring countries.

From the Romanian perspective, a new dynamic in the transatlantic relationship is needed in order to develop common concrete EU–US projects in the field of institution building, combating all types of trafficking, and setting up a sound economic environment that can project eastwards. We believe that joint and constant European Union–United States initiatives for resolving the frozen conflicts in the region, including Transdnistria, could prove decisive for finding viable and lasting solutions at the future EU borders.

On our contribution to the European Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), I would stress the 2004 European Commission Regular Report’s conclusion that “Romania has continued to align itself with the CFSP and confirmed its good track record in this area.” Moreover, since the 1997 EU opinion on Romanian readiness, the European Commission has judged that Romania has continued to make steady progress in adopting the CFSP acquis in domestic legislation, and that its overall performance in this field is more than satisfactory.

In the same vein, Romania’s active engagement in European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) operations such as Concordia in Macedonia and the EU Police Mission and Althea peacekeeping operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina confirms our reliability as an EU partner even before de jure membership ends.

We need a strengthened European Union–United States relationship for the benefit of a strong Europe.