

ForMin Aurescu advocates stronger US economic presence in Romania

Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu had an online discussion on Thursday with representatives of the leadership of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), advocating on this occasion a stronger American economic presence in Romania and also asking for AJC's support for Romania's inclusion in the Visa Waiver program, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a release.

Minister Aurescu tackled Romania's foreign policy priorities, the perspectives of the Romania - US Strategic Partnership, the Romania - Israel strategic relations, the relations between the EU and Israel, as well as Romania's commitment to combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia and discrimination and for preserving the memory of the Holocaust.

The Foreign Minister referred to the importance of the Three Seas Initiative, which is aimed at reducing the gap between Eastern and Western Europe and is a valuable contribution to increasing EU cohesion and strengthening transatlantic cooperation, an aspect Romania has consistently and steadily promoted in the last three years. Aurescu also highlighted the importance of accomplishing the Constanta - Gdansk railway project (Rail2Sea) and the Via Carpathia transnational highway connection, projects with a strategic impact on the economic development of the Three Seas region.

"In this context, the Romanian Foreign Minister advocated an as strong as possible American economic presence in Romania and in the region, which would double the military presence, and underlined the importance of increasing the American military presence in Romania in the context of Black Sea security challenges. He also requested AJC's support for the inclusion of Romania in the Visa Waiver program," shows the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Romanian top diplomat welcomed the activity of the AJC in support of fundamental democratic values, this being a priority objective of Romania, including as a strategic partner of the US, as a firm promoter of the transatlantic relationship and friend of Israel, with which it shares a relationship with strategic valences.

Aurescu reaffirmed Romania's constant commitment to taking responsibility for the past and rejecting and sanctioning of any form of anti-Semitism, as well as condemning Holocaust denial and distortion. In this regard, the Minister informed that the Romanian government is in the final stage of approving the first National Strategy for preventing and combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech and the Action Plan for the implementation of this strategy.

At the same time, he assured that Romania will continue its efforts at EU level, including regarding the elaboration of the first EU Strategy for combating anti-Semitism.

ForMin Aurescu also emphasized Romania's concerns about the worldwide growth of anti-Semitic and extremist rhetoric in the context of the pandemic crisis, especially in the online environment, and reiterated Romania's firm condemnation of such developments.

AJC Executive Director David Harris expressed the organization's appreciation for Romania as a valuable strategic partner of the US and one of the strongest pro-transatlantic and pro-American voices in the EU.

He thanked Romania for its balanced and principled positions at European level, for supporting EU-Israel relations and for its leadership in combating anti-Semitism.

David Harris mentioned, in this context, Romania's successful Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) from 2016 to 2017, and the adoption during its term in office of the working

definition of anti-Semitism.

He also evoked the personality of the Romanian diplomat Mihnea Constantinescu, who played a crucial role in the exercise of this Presidency.

Minister Bogdan Aurescu assured that Romania will continue to promote the working definition of anti-Semitism, being one of the first countries to introduce this definition into law, and the AJC Executive Director encouraged the Romanian authorities to continue paying increased attention to the education of the young generation on the subject of the Holocaust and the harmful effects of extremist or undemocratic regimes.

As regards Romania's foreign policy priorities for the next period, the Romanian top diplomat emphasized that they will continue, predictably and coherently, on the same fundamental pillars - increasing Romania's role and profile within the EU and NATO, strengthening and expanding the Strategic Partnership with the US, the deep attachment to multilateralism and observance and promotion of international law and democratic values.

With regard to the development of the Strategic Partnership with the US, Minister Bogdan Aurescu expressed Romania's conviction that, under the new US administration, the bilateral relationship will further deepen and diversify in all areas of common interest.

The Minister also mentioned the importance of 2021 for the bilateral relationship with the US, as this year marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Joint Declaration on the Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century between Romania and the United States and of the coming in force of the Agreement on the deployment of the US ballistic missile defense system to Romania, these moments offering an additional opportunity for the development and deepening of the bilateral relationship.

He assured that, within the EU and NATO, as well as in other relevant bodies, Romania will continue to be a strong supporter of a strengthened transatlantic relationship, emphasizing that Europe and the USA are part of the same community of values and security.

Also, Minister Aurescu expressed special appreciation for the privileged relations between Romania and the State of Israel, which have lately had a substantive high-level dialogue.

In this regard, he referenced the official visit of the Romanian Prime Minister to the State of Israel in November 2020, as well as his own visit to Israel in September 2020, pointing out that the talks held on these occasions highlighted the deepening of the political dialogue, the intensification of economic cooperation and strengthened cooperation on defense and security.

He also mentioned the creation of the bilateral working group tasked with strengthening economic cooperation in areas of common interest - agriculture and water management, health, high technology and artificial intelligence, and voiced the desire of both parties to organize the third meeting of the two governments later this year.

Minister Aurescu reiterated Romania's readiness to strengthen EU cooperation with Israel, reaffirming Romania's support for the resumption of the meetings of the EU-Israel Association Council.

Aurescu also referred to the stage of the Middle East Peace Process, reiterating on this occasion Romania's support for a lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as Romania supports the settlement of the dispute based on international law and the solution of two states, Israel and Palestine, coexisting side by side in peace and security, as the only viable option that meets the aspirations of both parties.

ForMin Aurescu mentioned that Romania will continue to concretely support the engagement of the two parties in

a constructive dialogue, with a view to the two parties resuming direct negotiations in order to identify a sustainable solution. Bogdan Aurescu reiterated the appreciation of the Romanian side for the normalization of the relations between the State of Israel and a series of Arab states, as well as for the relevant role of the US in this process. He also expressed confidence that the normalization of relations could contribute to the stability and security of the Middle East and increase the level of trust among the actors in the region.

The ForMin also reviewed the major opportunities and challenges facing Romania, the EU and the international community in the coming period, such as the development and implementation of post-crisis recovery plans, the security situation in the Black Sea region and the Middle East, debates and strategic reflections on the future and profile of the European Union (Conference on the Future of Europe) and NATO (NATO 2030), as well as the importance of promoting bilateral relations and cooperation formats with those countries that share the same values. The perspectives of the Iranian nuclear file were also discussed.

The AJC leadership - one of the most prestigious and important organizations dedicated to globally combating anti-Semitism - was represented at the online dialogue with Minister Bogdan Aurescu by national President Harriet Schleifer, Executive Director David Harris and Honorary President John Shapiro.