

PM Orban, French counterpart Castex sign new, updated, ambitious roadmap for Romania - France Strategic Partnership

Prime Minister Ludovic Orban, currently on a two-day official visit to Paris at the head of a delegation that includes Foreign Affairs Minister Bogdan Aurescu, Minister of Economy Virgil Popescu, Minister of National Defense Nicolae Ciuca, and Agriculture Minister Adrian Oros, declared today that he and his French counterpart Jean Castex signed a new, updated, ambitious roadmap for the Romania - France Strategic Partnership.

"This is an extremely important visit in a symbolic year when we celebrate 140 years of diplomatic relations. Our countries are bound by a Strategic Partnership, and our joint desire is to render this partnership even more strategic, that is why we have signed a new roadmap with an updated, ambitious structure, which aims to further tighten relations between France and Romania, both bilaterally and at European and international level," Premier Orban said on Monday, after the meeting with French Prime Minister Jean Castex and the ceremony for the signing of several bilateral documents.

He went on to highlight the important French economic presence in Romania.

"French investments generate a lot of jobs and before the pandemic, the economic exchanges between our countries reached almost 10 billion euros a year. We want this cooperation to grow, to diversify, and deepen, to generate even more beneficial effects," said the Romanian PM.

He also specified that together with his French counterpart he signed a Declaration of Intent regarding civil nuclear cooperation, a sector Romania wants to develop "together with reliable partners".

"French and Romanian companies can virtually cooperate in all fields," Orban said, mentioning as potential areas of cooperation transportation, energy, cyber security, telecommunications.

"We have also decided to intensify the bilateral dialogue on security and defense. Thus, we have mutually committed to continue regular, substantive consultations at the level of Foreign Affairs and Defense Ministers in the 2 + 2 format," Orban said.

Referring to cultural cooperation with France, he pointed out that "between November 2018 and November 2019 we celebrated the Romanian-French friendship through an extraordinary cultural season. Next year we plan to celebrate George Enescu together, on the 140th anniversary of the composer's birth, and Bucharest will host the 25th edition of the 'George Enescu' Festival."

He also mentioned the reaffirmation of the joint commitment to strengthen the European project.

"We will engage in an intense dialogue in the perspective of France's taking over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (...) In the same context, we emphasized the importance of rapidly implementing the mechanisms and instruments allowing the use of the funds in the future European budget and those available under the European Economic Recovery Plan," Orban said.

The head of the Romanian Executive underlined that he conveyed to his French counterpart Romania's "legitimate expectation" to see its Schengen accession bid greenlighted.

"We have asked for support with speeding up a positive decision. We are also expecting support in another

important file for Romania, its joining the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as Romania is the best placed European candidate and we are counting on the support of our European partners and, primarily of France, for the enlargement process to be completed," Orban said.

The Prime Minister said that during bilateral talks he wished the French Prime Minister success in carrying out his term at a time when "France, Europe and the entire world must face the challenges posed by the pandemic."

"Romania is promoting an EU-wide coordinated approach to the crisis response," he added.

Ludovic Orban mentioned that he assured his French counterpart of all the "compassion and solidarity" of the Romanian side after "teacher Samuel Paty's assassination by a terrorist".

"We also conveyed our solidarity with France in respecting our fundamental values and the importance of a space where freedom of expression and conscience are protected from violence and censorship. Ad hominem attacks against a head of a state who is targeted personally, such as the recent one against President Emmanuel Macron are not acceptable from our point of view. Mutual respect between partners and allies is paramount and differences of approach or moments of crisis must be overcome through constructive dialogue and mutual respect," Orban concluded.