

## Adrian Zuckerman: I am bullish on Romania, economic development slowed by limited infrastructure

**The US Ambassador in Bucharest, Adrian Zuckerman, stated in an interview granted to AGERPRES, at the conclusion of his mandate, that Romania's economy has glowing perspectives, but its development is slowed by limited infrastructure.**

He stated that in the past year important things were accomplished in what regards the development of Romania's defence capacities, and cooperation from the military perspective with the USA "was never better".

According to him, the Romanian Government has made "important steps" in developing infrastructure and significant progress is being made in the fight against organized crime, against the trafficking of persons.

Adrian Zuckerman added that he USA supports the projects Via Carpathia and Rail2Sea, mentioning that he would have wished for significant progress to exist in this regard, but that due to the pandemic and the two sets of elections, several initiatives did not progress as fast as it were possible in other conditions.

He also mentioned that he is determined to support Romania and all the projects started in the last year, mentioning there are no reasons for which it could not become "a leader in Europe".

**AGERPRES: Romanian President Klaus Iohannis awarded you the Star of Romania medal in the rank of Grand Cross. What does it represent for you?**

**US Ambassador:** It's a great honour for me to receive the medal from President Iohannis. I think President Iohannis was very kind and very generous. It's a very humbling experience for me, and I wish I could have done more than he thanked me for what I did. But I want to thank the people of Romania for what they did, because the people of Romania had the courage to move forward and achieve great things this year (...). So, I am very humbled by the award, very thankful to President Iohannis and to the people of Romania.

**You said you wish you could have done more. What are your regrets? What did you plan to achieve?**

I don't have regrets, but I always wish we could do more; those people who know me, like these folks here, they know that I tried to do everything as much as I can everyday; I think we could have had more economic development. I think everything we have done we could have done faster so that we could have done more of it. We have achieved great things in terms of military cooperation and development of Romania's military defence capabilities. I think, I was hopeful some of them would have moved faster, and could have been more of it, but it's moving at a great pace; the cooperation has never been better, the Romanian military has never been closer to the US military and to NATO and to the EU. It's a very, very credible defence force to protect Romanian borders' integrity and European integrity.

Economically, a lot of things could been done. Romania is rich in forests, the agriculture, the oil, gas, technology, manufacturing, all of the sectors to be improved; infrastructure projects could be advanced further. Big steps were taken by the Orban government in 2020 to advance infrastructure development. We are assisting, helping to develop Via Carpathia from Constanta to Gdansk and the Rail2Sea, which follows the same basic trajectory, same path. I wish we could have had more progress on that. Unfortunately, because of COVID, because of two sets of elections this past year a lot of projects were not advanced as quickly as that would have been possible. But I have no regrets because we still moved forward and a lot of very, very positive things were achieved.

Similarly, in the judicial area, there were a lot of legislative initiatives set forth. We made great progress in the fight against organized crime, in the fight against human trafficking, setting in motion the undoing of some prior legislation that protected various criminals. All the criminal laws had to be strengthened. So a lot of great things have been done.

We were able to achieve a historic agreement between the Orthodox Church, the City of Bucharest and the Government of Romania to provide shelters in Bucharest for the victims of trafficking - it was never done before. Last week I was in Timisoara and I met with the Metropolitan there, Ioan, to try to create the same type of shelter for victims of trafficking and I believe we will be successful there. I think a lot of very, very good things have happened and I am certain that they will continue this year, in the year afterwards. I am, as they say in the United States, I am very bullish on Romania.

**You were born here, you left when you were nine years old, do you plan to come back to Romania? If so, how often?**

I have no specific plans yet, but I have committed to do everything I can to continue to assist Romania in moving forward. It was a great year for me, personally, last year. I had a great reception by the people of Romania, the Government of Romania and I will continue to do everything within my power to help Romania to continue to grow and develop and to become the European leader that it can be. It's a country rich in natural resources, rich in good, educated, intellectual people. There is no reason Romania and the Romanian economy cannot be a leader in Europe and I am fully committed to help it in any way I can.

**During the hearings you had before being appointed Ambassador, you talked about the fact that you wanted to support the rule of law in Romania. Now that your term in office has come to an end, what do you think about this? Have there been significant changes in Romania?**

I think so. Although the Citu coalition government and before that, the Orban Government, did not have a majority in the Parliament, during 2020, I think we made tremendous strides forward. The Interior Minister, Vela, as well as the Justice Minister, Predoiu, as well as the (General, ed. n.) Prosecutor Scutea and others in law enforcement made tremendous strides forward. Minister Vela announced a zero tolerance policy against organized crime, against human trafficking. I made numerous calls, last year, for a variety of legislative changes, to assist law enforcement, which unfortunately, were not made by Parliament last year, but hopefully they will be made this year. So I think a lot of positive measures were taken so far, during the last year, in enforcement and applying the existing laws to their maximum degree, so I think a lot was done in that respect.

**What do you think are the perspectives on short-term bilateral economic cooperation?**

I think the economy of Romania has a very bright outlook. I think Prime Minister Citu, while he was Finance Minister last year, did a brilliant job. I think he will make sure that continues this year. I think a lot of the Romanian economy is held back by limitations in the infrastructure. As infrastructure starts to improve, I think more and more businesses and companies will come to Romania, more investors will come to Romania, hopefully more from the United States. There are already over 400 American companies doing business in Romania, from some very large ones, like Ford Motor Company, Coca-Cola and others to some very small ones, advisory companies that do business all over the world. So I think Romania's economic future is very, very bright, as long as we maintain the rule of law and the equal application of the rule of law to everybody. If that is done, Romania's future is absolutely brilliant. So I'm very, very optimistic on that, because I see that only improving under the new coalition government and we're very happy to see how well the coalition is advancing and the progress they're making. We have only words of encouragement and good wishes for them.

**Are there perspective for increased US military presence in Romania?**

We signed in October a ten-year military defence cooperation roadmap. Part of that was the deployment to Romania of an additional number of troops on a rotational basis. A Stryker unit was being considered - I think that is still under consideration and moving forward. Obviously, that is for the new Administration in the United States to review, but as far as I know, it's moving forward. The Romanian military, as I mentioned earlier, is being assisted in every respect and Romania is being provided with the highest technology defence weaponry that the United States has, like Patriot missiles, HIMARS, Piranha vehicles and other equipment to assist it to make sure its border integrity is secure and that it's an absolutely credible defence force against any foreign threat.

**What is your point of view on the violent events that took place on January 6th at the Capitol and what do they mean for the US geopolitical credibility in the future?**

We oppose any violence by any political party at any time and at any place. So, it was unfortunate that there was any violence. Unfortunately, in the past year, in America there were various incidents of violence in different cities across America and all such incidents are equally deplorable and they should not occur. They go counter to free speech and all democratic values and, notwithstanding these incidents of violence it is important to note there will be a smooth transfer of power in the government and we're going to move forward and I hope we get beyond this very quickly. It's unfortunate that certain individuals engaged in violent conduct - recently in January - but it's also equally unfortunate that certain individuals engaged in violent conduct over the last year in different cities across the US. Violence from anybody should not be countenanced in a democratic country.

**The transition from the Trump Administration to the Biden Administration seems to have split the Americans in two. What do you think has caused this fracture in American society?**

I think Americans believe in free speech and I just want to make sure everybody in Romania and outside of Romania who may be reading this understands that they should not mistake discussions between Americans, during political election seasons, as any kind of insinuations or weakness or problems in America. I think these are like family discussions and that America is still the world's leading democratic nation, I think it will remain so, I think America will have a bright future under the Biden Administration. They will move forward, as we've always moved forward and people should not give more credence to this fracture of the American people who will come together moving forward. America is still the world's leader economically, politically, democratically and it will remain so.

**After you leave, do you plan to continue your career in diplomacy?**

I have made no plans moving forward, but I have said publicly, before, that I am committed to continuing to help Romania in any way I can and to support all the advancements and projects that we started this year and to assist with some projects that we never had the opportunity to reach this year because of the pandemic and other issues that delayed us from reaching a number of issues. So, I'm very committed to helping Romania move forward in a positive way.

**What did you find out about Romania during your mandate? About Romania and about Romanians.**

Romania is a wonderful country with wonderful people and I want to thank them profusely for making me feel so much at home here. It was a wonderful year for me and I wish I would be here longer. I wish COVID would not have limited some of the opportunities that we could have otherwise had to achieve more things during this past year. But I think Romania is a country filled with beautiful, beautiful people and as an example of that, it is one of the very few number of countries that actually helped the United States this year. They sent a number of doctors to Alabama to help with the COVID crisis, and some other experts with the doctors for which I am just enormously thankful. I know that the President is enormously thankful, and it shows the real charitable and gracious and

helpful spirit of the Romanian people and I cannot thank them enough. It was a wonderful gesture.

**Do you have a message for the Romania people?**

Thank you very much, it was a wonderful year for me. And I hope, as I said before, to continue my assistance in any regard possible, to help advance Romania to become a leader in the European Union.

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Adrian Zuckerman has taken over the role of US Ambassador to Romania on December 14, 2019. A lawyer by trade, Zuckerman emigrated to the United States of America from Romania at the age of 10 and is a fluent speaker of Romanian. He replaced former US Ambassador Hans Klemm who served as Ambassador since September 21, 2015.

On January 18, 2020, President Klaus Iohannis decorated Adrian Zuckerman with the National Order of the Star of Romania in the rank of Grand Cross, during a ceremony that took place at the Cotroceni Palace. According to the decree signed by the Romanian head of state, the distinction was granted to Ambassador Zuckerman as a sign of "high appreciation for the entire activity conducted during his mandate to Romania, as well as for the substantial involvement in the development and deepening of the Strategic Partnership between our country and the United States of America."