

**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CHUCK HAGEL**

**STATEMENT WITH ROMANIAN DEFENSE MINISTER MIRCEA DUSA**

**CONSTANTA, ROMANIA**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 2014**

Minister Dusa, thank you.

I appreciated being with you at the NATO Defense Ministerial meetings in Brussels earlier this week, and I am glad to be here with you in Romania today.

Romania is a steadfast friend and ally of the United States, and I thank the Romanian people for extending their warm hospitality to me, and to the men and women of America's armed forces serving here in Romania...at MK Air Base and on the U.S.S. *Vella Gulf*.

Earlier today, the Minister and I met and reaffirmed the strong strategic partnership between our nations.

I wanted to visit Romania to make clear that the United States appreciates Romania's contributions to security in the region and around the world. Romanian troops served with honor in Iraq.

Some 1,200 remain deployed in Afghanistan...and the United States is grateful for Romania's steadfast commitment to the NATO mission there – especially as your nation marks 10 years of NATO membership. America recognizes the sacrifices of Romanian troops – and their families – over the past decade of war.

Today, Romania continues to provide critical support for our nations' shared strategic objectives...by permitting U.S. and coalition troops to transit in and out of Afghanistan through MK Air Base. Well over 50,000 U.S. troops transited MK in the first 100 days of operations. And later today, I look forward to seeing the full scope of our operations at MK, which includes soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines.

MK Air Base will remain essential for the new phase of our efforts in Afghanistan. It also demonstrates the United States' and Romania's broader defense cooperation – which is becoming even more important in the wake of Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Minister Dusa and I discussed those actions and the situation in Ukraine. This week, President Obama was in neighboring Poland, and I was at the NATO Ministerial in Brussels...to reaffirm America's commitment to the collective security of all NATO Allies. The presence of the USS *Vella Gulf* is a clear expression of this commitment. Another example is President Obama's announcement this week that we will ask Congress for up to \$1 billion to enhance the readiness of U.S. and Allied forces in Europe, including more U.S. troop rotations for exercises and training, and a stronger presence of U.S. ships in the Black Sea.



The U.S. has maintained a regular Naval presence in the Black Sea since mid-March, with the USS *Truxton*, the USS *Donald Cook*, and the USS *Taylor* all conducting port calls in Romania, and we will sustain this tempo going forward. We are also stepping up our cooperation with other partners and allies surrounding the Black Sea – including Bulgaria, Georgia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

This week in Brussels, I emphasized that, as the United States increases *its* commitments to European security, we are looking for our European Allies to do the same. Romania has already decided to increase investment in its defense enterprise. The United States also appreciates the *kinds* of investments Romania is making...in infrastructure, advanced capabilities, and modernization.

One important example of Romania's increased defense investments is its purchase of F-16 fighter jets – and Romania has already had several training engagements with the United States and Portugal in preparation for receiving its F-16's. As I told the Minister, the United States intends to continue working with Romania to strengthen its military aviation capabilities. Having seen the results of America's joint Aviation Detachment in Poland, I hope to begin similar cooperation between the U.S., Poland, and Romania.

Another important area of cooperation between the United States and Romania is missile defense. Following a successful recent test, we are on track for the Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense system to be installed in Romania next year. And Vice-President Biden reviewed our missile defense cooperation when he was here last month. This new system will be part of Phase II of the European Phased Adaptive

Approach, and, once operational, it will mark another milestone in our bilateral defense relationship, and another major achievement as Romania fortifies its position on the front line of regional security.

Minister Dusa, the United States is committed to strengthening its partnership and friendship with Romania...as we work together to shape a more secure and prosperous world.

Thank you.