

Romanians Accept Plan for Basing of Missiles

By NICHOLAS KULISH and ELLEN BARRY

Published: February 4, 2010

MUNICH — Romania's top defense body approved an American proposal to base missile interceptors there, the country's president said Thursday in a hastily arranged announcement.

The president, Traian Basescu, said in a statement that Romania, a former Warsaw Pact member and now part of NATO, was prepared to negotiate with the United States to accept ground-based interceptors as part of an antiballistic missile defense system. He said it could be working by 2015.

While the participation of Poland and the Czech Republic in the missile shield had been well known, the possibility that Romania would join them was not.

Romania made its announcement as Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates was in Turkey for a NATO meeting. He was not immediately available to comment but the White House spokesman, Robert Gibbs, said the announcement was welcomed. **"We're pleased that Romania has agreed to participate in that defense shield,"** he told reporters in Washington.

Political analysts in Romania said the speed of Mr. Basescu's announcement appeared to be an attempt to capitalize on the agreement at the expense of political rivals at home, where most view a deepening of ties with the United States favorably and where Mr. Basescu narrowly won re-election in December.

"He wanted to take credit and announce, **'In my second mandate, I'm this strong and big contributor for Romanian national security,'**" said Radu Tudor, a correspondent in Bucharest for Jane's Defense Weekly.

Mr. Basescu said the proposal accepted by the Supreme Defense Council came from President Obama, whose under secretary of state for arms control and international security, Ellen O. Tauscher, was in Romania.

Mr. Obama abruptly changed course on the proposed antiballistic missile shield in September, focusing on a system designed to shoot down short- and medium-range missiles from Iran.

The original system, proposed by President George W. Bush, would have put a radar installation in the Czech Republic and interceptors in Poland. Russia opposed the plans, arguing that the system, so close to its border, was a security threat. Russian criticism diminished after Mr. Obama reconfigured the proposal to use smaller interceptors.

Mr. Basescu said that with Romania's participation, the system was not directed at Russia but rather **"against other threats," without specifying them.**

Dmitri V. Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, said the Romanian announcement would not come as a complete surprise to Russian leaders, since it “was one of the options people had in mind.” He said the Romanian site was farther from the Russian border, and — unlike the proposed Polish site — would not allow the interceptor missiles to stop a Russian missile headed to the United States over the Arctic Ocean, a possibility that had aroused anxiety in Moscow.

“Of course, people who would be interested in portraying any kind of missile system as potentially a threat will be able to use this, but I don’t think the government has much interest in playing this up,” Mr. Trenin said.

Russian leaders still complain that the missile system could upset the cold war balance of power. Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin said in December that the plan was the main obstacle to negotiations on replacing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

But Aleksandr A. Khramchikhin, assistant director of the Institute of Political and Military Analysis, in Moscow, told the Web site gzt.ru that Russia had long suggested Romania or Bulgaria as an alternative to the Polish and Czech sites.

Nicholas Kulish reported from Munich, and Ellen Barry from Moscow. Helene Cooper contributed reporting from Washington.

The New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/05/world/europe/05romania.html>