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## ROMANIAN PM VISITS FRANCE

Prime Minister Victor Ponta's visit to France was considered by many observers in the Romanian media a major foreign policy success and a considerable step in the development of the bilateral relations of the two countries. **Victor Ponta is the first Romanian PM to visit France in more than a decade** (the last visit was recorded in 2001). The visit comprised several high-level discussions with key French politicians, such as Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault or President François Hollande, as well as representatives of the business environment. In political terms, the visit of the Romanian Prime minister was considered a success because it managed to gain the support of one of the most important EU members for several initiatives.

The fact that the Prime Minister's first official visit was in France underlines **the tremendous importance Victor Ponta attaches to entertaining cordial relations with France**. After several years of lukewarm relations between the two countries, Victor Ponta decided that Romania needs to make an important step towards fixing the issues that hampered the political relations between the two countries. The Prime Minister signed a document that will allow the strategic partnership between the two countries to be re-launched and to continue for another 5 years. The strategic partnership concerns mostly the economic area, creating favorable conditions for investments that benefit both parties. Moreover, the two parties discussed the prospects of the steel industry, agreeing to cooperate towards the establishment of a European strategy in this field.

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The French Prime Minister expressed his support for Romania's accession to the Schengen Area, declaring **that France will support Romania's position at the March European Justice and Internal Affairs Council.**

Another meeting of major importance the prime Minister had during his France visit was the one had with CEOs of 16 major French companies. The Prime Minister outlined several major projects that are important to Romania which can foster better conditions for growth and for investment, some of them being planned to be completed this year.

The French visit has a major importance in Prime Minister Victor Ponta's foreign policy program. The main objectives on Victor Ponta's agenda are to repair the foreign relations of Romania, which have suffered during the last couple of years and to create favorable conditions for the development of Romania's economic relations and for an increase of foreign investment. To this end, Victor **Ponta has already had important meetings with the socialist leaders in Austria and Italy, a visit in Denmark being scheduled for the next week.**