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## Romania approves stationing of US troops in its bases

By ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BUCHAREST, Romania

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Romania's parliament on Wednesday approved an agreement allowing the United States to use four Romanian military bases and station up to 3,000 troops in the former communist country.

Lawmakers voted 257-1, with 29 nationalists abstaining, to approve the 10-year agreement, which was signed in December 2005 by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

"It is very serious for Romania to become a buffer state between two major nuclear powers," said Lucian Bolcas, a senior leader of the nationalist Great Romania Party, referring to the United States and Russia.

Russia has criticized the deployment of US troops in former communist countries such as Romania.

Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu lauded the agreement, saying that for decades after 1945 many Romanians had "only one hope: that the American troops would come and free us from communism."

Today, however, "Romania is no longer a victim looking for a savior, but a partner of the United States in the fight against terrorism," he said.

The United States is expected to take over the Mihail Kogalniceanu air base, near Constanta, later this year, though no exact date has been announced. US troops are also allowed to use three training ranges in southeast and central Romania.

Some 1,500 American troops will begin training at the Kogalniceanu base, which would be the first to be set up by Americans in a former Warsaw Pact country.



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A formation of US Air Force F15 fighter jets approaches a KC135 Stratotanker in Romanian airspace during a day of joint exercises with Romanian air force teams started at the Mihail Kogalniceanu air base, 250 kilometers east of Bucharest, Wednesday. Photo: AP

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