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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE
STRATEGIES XXI

THE COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC
NATURE OF THE SECURITY
ENVIRONMENT

February 28th, 2024

EDITORS:

Florian CÎRCIUMARU, Ph.D.
Iulia COJOCARU



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DYNAMICS OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINEAN WAR. AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT ON FUTURE SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

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Abstract: *In the context of geopolitical developments and international tensions, the war in Ukraine is a crucial contemporary reference point, capturing the attention of the international community by its complexity and scale. This conflict, which began in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and intensified in the eastern regions of Ukraine, has generated a series of profound transformations in the landscape of security and international relations. Detailed analysis of the dynamics of the Russian-Ukrainian war becomes essential for understanding its long-term implications for security and defence policies. This analytical process is not limited to investigating the conflict itself, but extends to assessing how events in Ukraine have shaped and will continue to shape national and international security strategies. Shaping future security and defence policy in Europe, with direct implications for Romania, given its position on the border with Ukraine and its membership of NATO, should be based on a comprehensive and coordinated approach.*

Keywords: *security and defence policy; war; alliances; strategies; aggression; partnerships; change.*

Introduction

In the context of significant geopolitical changes over the last decade, the war in Ukraine has become a major focus of international attention, with profound consequences for security and stability in the Eastern European region. This research focuses on the dynamics of this complex conflict and its impact on future security and defence policy, both regionally and globally.

The war in Ukraine is not just an isolated conflict, but a phenomenon with far-reaching implications, affecting the world order and posing major challenges to the international community. In light of this context, our analysis aims to explore the evolution of the conflict, the changes it has brought to the geopolitical landscape and, more importantly, how these elements shape future security and defence policies (Council of the EU 2021).

In this analysis, we aim to explore the various aspects of this war, from its historical and geopolitical roots to recent developments and their impact on future security and defence policies. We will investigate not only the military dimensions of the conflict, but also its consequences for regional relations, political dynamics and the adaptation of global security strategies.

This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive perspective, highlighting the complex interactions between the actors involved and how the Russian-Ukrainian war is becoming a determining factor in shaping new international security paradigms. We therefore invite readers to explore with us this intricate web of events and understand the implications it has for shaping and adapting future global security and defence policies.

The motivation for choosing to write this scholarly article is underpinned by several considerations, which I will present as concisely as possible:

- The Russian-Ukrainian war is one of the most significant conflicts of contemporary times, with major implications for regional and global security. Analysis of this conflict provides an opportunity to understand the dynamics of events and their impact on security policies.

- The war in Ukraine has generated a number of important lessons about resilience, security innovation and adaptation to threats. These lessons can provide useful guidance for the development and adjustment of other states' security policies.

- Conflict analysis provides insight into the complexity of regional interactions and how they may influence future security and defence policies. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for promoting stability and security in the region.

- An article that takes an in-depth look at the Russian-Ukrainian war makes a valuable contribution to academic debates in the field of international relations, security and foreign policy. Delving deeper into the subject can offer new and challenging insights.

- The article aims to highlight how events in Ukraine have impacted and will continue to influence the future security and defence policies of the states involved or other regional and international actors.

- Overall, by writing this article the aim is to make a significant contribution to the analysis of the complexity and evolution of the conflict in Ukraine, focusing on the impact on future security and defence policies.

The importance of impact analysis on security and defence policy at European level

In the context of geopolitical developments over the last decade, the analysis of the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on security and defence policy is of particular importance at European level and, implicitly, within the Member States, including Romania. This importance derives from the multiple dimensions and consequences that the conflict has generated in the international security landscape.

The war in Ukraine has been directly affecting stability in Europe, highlighting the vulnerabilities of the collective security system. By analysing the impact on security policy at European level, we can identify how Member States and regional organisations have responded to this challenge, developing common strategies and strengthening cooperation to counter emerging threats.

Another important issue is the reconfiguration of the EU's eastern border, as a direct consequence of the conflict. This has led to a reconsideration of security policies at regional level, with an impact on relations with the EU's immediate neighbourhood. Analysis of these changes helps to shape more effective strategies for managing relations with Eastern European states.

As far as Romania is concerned, the analysis of the impact on security and defence policy highlights how our country has strengthened its position in European and transatlantic efforts. Assessing the consequences of the conflict helps to shape a national strategy to ensure security and stability on the eastern borders of the EU and NATO. In this first part, we have explored in depth developments and responses at European and national level, highlighting the relevance of analysing the impact on security and defence policy in the context of the fundamental changes brought about by the war in Ukraine.

1. Developments in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine

In 2014, the Russian Hybrid Warfare escalated in Ukraine with Russia's annexation of Crimea, followed by the outbreak of hostilities in eastern Ukraine. The initial reason for the conflict was the rejection of the association agreement with the European Union by former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, which sparked widespread pro-European protests in the country (Free Europe Romania 2023). In the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, pro-Russian separatist groups have proclaimed independence, actively and covertly supported by Russian forces. This led to armed conflict between Ukrainian forces and separatist groups, resulting in

significant casualties and massive destruction. In an attempt to end the hostilities, two peace agreements were signed in Minsk (2014 and 2015) (Kuchma, et. al. 2015).

However, these have not been fully implemented, with the hybrid war continuing despite international pressure. Between 2016 and 2019, the conflict in Donbas persisted, with periods of escalation and reduction of violence. Separatist groups controlled areas in the east and borders remained insecure, contributing to a climate of instability and tension. Maritime incidents in the Strait of Kerch in 2018 added a new element of tension between Russia and Ukraine.

Russia's seizure of Ukrainian sailors has heightened tensions, drawing the attention of the international community (Wikipedia).

In the context of changing political and international relations, the evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and its transformation into a real conflict has also been influenced by other major events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in global politics.

At present, there are ongoing international efforts to find a peaceful solution and to promote respect for Ukraine's sovereignty. Diplomatic dialogue, negotiations and international pressure remain key tools in managing and resolving this complex conflict. The evolution of the conflict reflects a number of significant challenges and changes in the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe and international relations, and is a major issue of concern for the global community.

By analysing these phases and changes, the complexity and dynamics of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are outlined, highlighting the complex interactions between the actors involved and the multiple influences that have marked the evolution of this conflict in recent years.

2. Regional and Global Security Implications

2.1 International responses and alliances in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

By exploring regional and global responses to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, this chapter aims to understand the complexity of international interactions and the long-term impact on global security and stability.

The European Union has condemned the annexation of Crimea and Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine, imposing economic sanctions and diplomatic restrictions against the Russian Federation (Council of the EU).

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has expressed support for Ukraine, strengthening its military presence in Eastern Europe and reinforcing defence of member states affected by the conflict. The United Nations has played a leading role in mediating dialogue and promoting peaceful solutions, but the different positions of permanent members in the Security Council have brought challenges to the adoption of decisive resolutions (Ministry of FOREIGN AFFAIRS 2021). The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe has conducted monitoring missions and tried to facilitate dialogue between the parties involved, but difficulties in implementing agreements have called into question its effectiveness.

China, as a non-allied state and having a special partnership with Russia has taken a relatively neutral stance, avoiding direct condemnation of Moscow and advocating a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Some states not directly involved have also chosen to remain neutral or take a moderate stance, being cautious in expressing support or criticism.

States directly affected by conflict have sought to strengthen regional alliances to address common threats and promote collective security. Several states have strengthened bilateral security cooperation, sharing information and resources to counter threats in the region. The conflict has led to a reassessment of the global balance of power and helped redefine the international order. Events related to the conflict have raised questions about the future of global security, highlighting the need for international cooperation to prevent and manage similar crises.

2.2 Romania's involvement in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and geopolitical changes and the impact on international security

Romania has expressed its strong support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, condemning Russia's aggressive actions. Romania has supported and participated in the sanctions measures imposed by the EU against Russia, thus contributing to the collective deterrence efforts.

Romania has played an active role in providing diplomatic and political support to Ukraine, advocating support from the international community and condemning the aggression. Romania has provided humanitarian assistance and military support to Ukraine, strengthening bilateral ties and contributing to collective efforts to counter aggression. Through its involvement in regional initiatives such as the Three Seas Initiative, Romania has contributed to strengthening solidarity in the region and developing common security strategies.

In the context of increased military activities and regional tensions, Romania has strengthened border security and worked with NATO partners to strengthen common defence. As a member of NATO and the EU, Romania has advocated regional solidarity, stressing the importance of cooperation in the region to maintain security and stability.

Romania's involvement in this crisis situation reflects the country's commitment to European and transatlantic values and its determination to contribute to regional security in the context of threats to the international order.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has led to a re-dimensioning of international relations, with an intensification of tensions between Western states and Russia. New geopolitical alliances and collisions have had a significant impact on the global balance of power. Central and Eastern European states reconsidered security strategies and sought to strengthen regional alliances. Cooperation groups such as the Three Seas Initiative (Ministry of FOREIGN AFFAIRS 2021) which was established at the beginning of 2014, have taken on increased importance in jointly addressing regional threats.

Tensions have led to an increase in NATO's military presence in the Black Sea region, including Romania. This has had a significant impact on security, raising the need to strengthen defensive capabilities. Control over natural resources, especially energy, has become a crucial element in the geopolitical dynamic. Romania, with its energy resources, has become an important player in this equation, with an increased role in ensuring regional energy security.

The impact on international security, including on Romania, has been felt in multiple dimensions, from changes in the configuration of regional alliances to the redefinition of national security priorities.

2.3 Analysis of Ukrainian capabilities and strategies in the face of aggression

Ukraine, with one of the largest armed forces in Europe, has mobilised its military capabilities to face Russian aggression. However, the level of technology and equipment posed significant challenges in confronting a powerful adversary. Ukraine has shown remarkable resilience among the civilian population, involving local communities in the defence process. This has been a key element in the strategy to resist and counter aggression.

Ukraine has sought the support of the international community to counter aggression. Working with regional and global partners has been crucial, both in terms of military assistance and diplomatic support. As an invaded state, Ukraine had to respond to both conventional and hybrid tactics, including intense disinformation campaigns and information warfare. The ability to manage these threats has been a vital component in the overall defence strategy (Council of the EU 2023).

The analysis of Ukrainian capabilities and strategies, together with Romania's involvement in support of them, highlights the complexity and interconnectedness of regional and global security issues.

3. Economic and social effects of the conflict

3.1 The impact on the economy, the Ukrainian communities, as well as the impact in Southeast Europe and Romania

- *Collapse of the economic sector.* The conflict has had a significant impact on the Ukrainian economy, with key sectors such as industry, agriculture and tourism suffering massive losses. Economic infrastructure has been destroyed and foreign investment has fallen dramatically.

- *Currency devaluation and inflation.* The instability generated by the conflict has led to a devaluation of the national currency and rising inflation, affecting the purchasing power of the population and generating additional economic difficulties (European Central Bank 2023).

- *Population displacement and internal refugees.* Millions of people have been forced to leave their homes because of the conflict, creating a humanitarian crisis. Local communities have had to cope with the massive influx of internal refugees and manage their needs under difficult conditions.

- *Destruction of local infrastructure.* Local infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and housing, has often been directly affected by conflict, with serious consequences for the daily life of communities.

- *Economic and geopolitical tensions.* South-East Europe has felt the effects of the conflict through regional destabilisation and increased geopolitical tensions. Romania, located close to the conflict, felt security pressures and had to manage the consequences for trade and energy relations.

- *Migration flows and humanitarian crisis management.* Romania has been involved in managing refugee flows and providing humanitarian assistance. This has put pressure on national resources and required coordination at regional level to address humanitarian challenges (Turza 2022)

Analysis of the economic and social impact of the conflict highlights the complexity of the interlinked problems and the need for collective regional efforts to mitigate the consequences.

3.2 Demographic and social changes generated by the conflict

The conflict has generated a massive exodus of people, with a significant number of people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, including Romania. Migration has had a significant impact on local and regional demographics. Migration brings significant demographic pressures, with host communities, including those in Romania, having to manage the integration of new arrivals, access to social services and the limited resources available. Large flows of migrants bring cultural diversity to host communities, including Romania. This diversity can contribute to a change in social dynamics and greater interculturality. Communities close to conflict zones, including those in Romania, may feel pressure on local resources such as housing, schools, health services and infrastructure.

Romania faces challenges in managing the social integration of migrants, ensuring that they have access to education, health services and adequate housing. Migration can bring economic opportunities, with the contribution of new human resources and opportunities for involvement in various sectors of the economy (Twinkl 2023).

The demographic and social changes generated by the conflict underline the complexity of its impact on communities and the need for a comprehensive approach to managing the consequences.

4. Adaptation of defense strategies in Europe

4.1 Changes in the defense policy of European states

Conflict has demonstrated significant paradigm shifts, including the use of hybrid tactics and information warfare, requiring adaptation to contemporary threats.

New technologies and methods of warfare require rapid adaptation of defence policy to ensure effectiveness and relevance. A reassessment of defence policy could promote greater solidarity and cooperation between EU Member States in the face of common threats.

An updated defence policy should include significant investment in advanced technologies, including cyber, artificial intelligence and rapid response capabilities. European states are recommended to strengthen military cooperation efforts and intelligence sharing to better address security threats.

Romania can play an active role in promoting and implementing joint defence initiatives within the European Union, thus contributing to strengthening regional and European security. Improving its own defence capabilities and actively participating in exercises and regional cooperation will support adaptation to new challenges.

Changes in the defence policy of European states are imperative in the context of the evolving Russian-Ukrainian conflict, underlining the need to anticipate and adapt to contemporary threats in order to maintain security and stability in the region and at European level (European Council 2023).

4.2 Cooperation between states and international organizations in the context of regional threats

Today's security threats do not respect national borders, requiring a regional and collaborative approach. Cooperation allows states to share resources and streamline efforts in the face of common threats. Organise joint military exercises and training between partner states, facilitating cohesion and interoperability of armed forces. Collaboration within international organisations for the rapid and effective exchange of security intelligence.

Active and synergetic involvement of the European Union and NATO in the development and implementation of regional security strategies, taking into account the specificities and resources of each organisation. Collaboration should focus on protecting shared values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Romania can contribute to regional efforts through active involvement in common security initiatives and strengthened partnerships with neighbouring countries. Given its strategic location, Romania can play a key role in strengthening security on NATO's and the EU's Eastern flank (Krentz 2023).

Regional cooperation allows for a rapid and effective response in crisis situations, helping to reduce the impact of security threats like the Black Sea Mine Countermeasures coalition between Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

Regional collaboration enables a rapid and effective response in crisis situations, helping to reduce the impact of security threats. Collaboration between states and international organisations in the context of regional threats is an essential pillar for strengthening solidarity and ensuring collective security in a changing world.

4.3 The use of new technologies in conflict management

The use of drones and advanced surveillance technology enables battlefield monitoring and critical real-time intelligence. The development of secure and efficient communication networks facilitates the coordination of military operations and the rapid exchange of information (Col. Cezar Popa and Col. (r) Prof. Ion Mitulețu 2021, 57-66).

The use of cyber technologies for attacks on critical infrastructure, communication networks and information systems, undermining enemy capabilities. Use of social media platforms and information manipulation technologies to influence public opinion and destabilise the adversary.

The development of advanced technologies for data protection and countering cyber attacks becomes essential in the current context. The use of new technologies in guerrilla tactics, such as cyber attacks on enemy infrastructure, provides a strategic advantage.

Romania and its allies must develop capabilities to counter cyber threats and protect cyber security. Reliance on technology brings increased risks, including vulnerability to cyber-attacks and inability to cope with potential technological disruption.

The use of new technologies in conflict management is a key development in modern warfare, requiring security and defence strategies to be continually adapted to meet increasingly complex technological challenges.

5. Prospects for resolution and stabilization

5.1 Peace initiatives and negotiation processes

Peace initiatives and negotiation processes are often mediated by organisations such as the UN, OSCE or the EU, which provide a neutral framework and support for dialogue. Addressing conflict preventively through diplomacy and dialogue can prevent the situation from escalating and pave the way for peaceful solutions (Council of the European Union 2022).

Neighbouring states, like The republic of Turkey, can play a crucial role in promoting dialogue and finding durable solutions, with a direct interest in regional stability (Fatma Tanis 2022). The involvement of the international community in the negotiation processes brings a diverse perspective and additional resources for stabilisation and reconstruction.

Providing humanitarian assistance in affected areas facilitates the reconstruction of infrastructure, helps the affected population and contributes to restoring confidence. The development of programmes to reintegrate affected communities and refugees into society is essential to restore normality.

International organizations can conduct peacekeeping missions to implement and monitor signed agreements, ensuring compliance with agreed terms. Providing long-term post-agreement reconstruction and development assistance contributes to strengthening stability and preventing the recurrence of conflict.

Peace initiatives and negotiation processes are crucial tools in addressing conflicts, offering viable prospects for resolving and stabilizing tense situations, provided they are managed with accountability, inclusiveness and dedication.

Romania should express its support for international initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and peaceful solutions in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Through direct involvement in the negotiation processes, Romania can contribute to the international community's efforts to bring the parties to the dialogue table and identify sustainable solutions.

Romania could significantly contribute to humanitarian efforts by providing aid to the affected areas, including sending resources and specialized personnel. By developing and implementing reintegration programs, Romania can support the process of reconstruction and reconciliation in the affected communities. Romania should act as a follower and promoter of European values within the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, emphasizing the importance of respecting human rights and democratic principles.

Romania must carefully monitor developments in the region and assess potential security risks, adapting its national strategies accordingly. By strengthening its defense capabilities, Romania contributes to maintaining regional security and deterring potential challenges. Romania's active participation in international peacekeeping and stabilization missions strengthens its commitment to global and regional security. Through close collaboration with NATO partners, Romania can contribute to the alliance's efforts in managing crisis situations (Presidential Administration 2020).

Romania's position in the perspective of resolving and stabilizing the Russian-Ukrainian conflict should reflect our country's firm commitment to peace, security and European democratic values.

5.2 Strategies for stabilizing the region and preventing similar conflicts at the European level

The European states neighboring Russia and Ukraine should promote a constructive and permanent dialogue, with the aim of resolving disputes and avoiding the escalation of conflicts (diplomacy and dialogue).

EU member states should strengthen unity and adopt a coordinated approach in managing crises and promoting European values in the region (strengthening European unity). European states should support and collaborate with organizations such as the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe to implement effective diplomatic and humanitarian measures.

Implementation and monitoring of human rights in the region should be a priority, with a focus on strengthening democracy and the rule of law. The European Community should provide consistent humanitarian support in the region, focusing on refugee aid, reconstruction and economic revitalization as mentioned in the European Union plans of reconstruction for Ukraine after the war (European Commission 2023). Developing effective strategies to counter cyber threats and the spread of disinformation is critical to maintaining regional stability. Member States should cooperate within the framework of the European Union's defense policy and strengthen their capabilities to face potential security challenges. Stabilizing the region requires active cooperation with neighboring states as well as international partners to ensure regional cohesion and resilience.

Economic and trade initiatives should support sustainable economic development and help create a climate conducive to cooperation and stability.

The implementation of these strategies at the European level could contribute significantly to stabilizing the region and preventing similar conflicts in the future.

Shaping the future security and defense policy in Europe, with direct implications for Romania given its position on the border with Ukraine and NATO membership, should be based on a comprehensive and coordinated approach (Krentz 2023).

Romania should continue to strengthen partnerships and collaboration within NATO, promoting initiatives that increase cohesion and solidarity in the face of regional threats. It should also invest in modernizing and developing its defense capabilities, including military infrastructure, to ensure credible deterrence and an effective response capability.

Greater attention should be paid to managing migration and countering hybrid threats, with the support of NATO and EU partners, to ensure stability and security at Romania's borders. Diplomacy and continuous dialogue should be a priority in relations with neighboring states and strategic partners, contributing to the reduction of tensions and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Investments in security technology and innovation should be part of shaping future defense policy, increasing efficiency and responsiveness. Romania should support cohesion and solidarity at the European level, actively contributing to the debates and decisions regarding the security and defense policy of the EU.

The promotion of democratic values and the rule of law in the region should be an essential pillar of Romania's security and defense policy, strengthening partnerships based on these principles.

Conclusions

The analysis revealed the complex nature of the conflict, marked by rapid changes and significant regional and global implications. The conflict highlighted the need to strengthen Romania's defense capabilities, emphasizing the importance of regional collaboration and adaptation to hybrid threats. The developments of the conflict induced geopolitical changes, requiring a rapid adaptation to the new realities and the strengthening of solidarity within

NATO and the EU. The importance of investing in innovation and technology has become evident to ensure effective security and response to cyber threats.

The impact on local economies and communities, including in South-Eastern Europe, underlines the need for careful management of social and demographic impacts. Future research should focus on understanding and countering asymmetric threats, including hybrid tactics. Exploring ways to strengthen international cooperation and strategic partnerships, with a focus on peaceful dispute resolution and migration management. Research should focus on integrating technology into security, including cyber and information security, to prevent emerging threats.

A detailed analysis of the impact of the conflict on economies and societies is required, aimed at identifying effective adaptation and recovery strategies. Future studies should assess how Romania can contribute to promoting stability and security in the region, as well as strengthening the alliance and the European Union.

By addressing these lines of research, the academic and security practitioner community can contribute to the development of a robust framework for understanding and managing contemporary security and defense threats.

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HUMAN LOSSES IN MODERN WAR – CASE STUDY IN THE CURRENT RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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Abstract: *Information provided by the war propaganda, both of Russia and Ukraine, published in the mass media, exaggerates the losses of the enemy and understates their own in order to maintain the morale of the fighters and their population, but also the support of military operations' financiers. This action is also supported by censorship (military and media), but the effects, on those who receive them, can be different, depending on the veracity of the information and the goals pursued by the two actors, as well as the public beliefs.*

Human losses of the belligerents in the Russo-Ukrainian war, even if they are not equal in quantity, are usually comparable and even necessary to be compared in order to study the tactics and strategy used, as well as the possibility of each of them to continue the fight. The human costs of war significantly influence the achievement of victory. Also, for military planners, it is important to know the real situation, both for designing and conducting operations and for organizing and equipping the health service that supports combat actions. If there is no exhaustive estimate of the losses of the Ukrainian forces, the reason is that they are kept secret by their officials. Through indirect analyses, OSINT and medical intelligence, we present a situation as close as possible to reality.

Keywords: *Ukraine; Russia; medical intelligence; human losses; collateral victims.*

Introduction

All wars, of any kind and from any time, cause human and material losses, with the aim of defeating the adversary. The belligerent forces of Antiquity, of tens of thousands of fighters, of the Middle Ages, of hundreds of thousands of fighters and those of the Modern Age of millions of fighters, caused numerous human losses, military and civilian. Nowadays, a possible nuclear war could cause billions of human casualties and immense material losses, or even the destruction of civilization as we know it.

In the year 2022, the Russians thought they would be greeted with flowers by their Ukrainian brothers, like the Germans in Austria in 1939, or in the German Democratic Republic in 1989. The secret services, incompetent or treacherous, did not correctly appreciate that Ukraine, starting from 2014, it was moving away from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, to get closer to NATO and the West. So the Russian army ran into a deadly trap, prepared in advance. The assault on Kiev was a tactical failure, and the Chechen Strike Group was annihilated on route to the objective. The Russian strategy was inadequate from the start and had to be changed on the fly, with heavy losses and incredible breakdowns in the logistical support of the operation.

By *human losses* is meant the number of fighters taken out of battle in total, respectively irrecoverable losses: KIA - killed in action or outside it (accidents, diseases, etc.) or recoverable or partially recoverable losses: WIA – wounded in action or outside it, sick (ordinary or

epidemic diseases, infected, intoxicated, burned, irradiated, etc.), shipwrecked, prisoners, arrested, deserters, MIA - missing in action, as well as refugees.

Contemporary military doctrines provide, in theory, intelligent combat actions, with minimal loss of human life and a number of wounded and sick, avoiding unnecessary excess mortality, if this is possible. In practice, however, the role of commanders at all levels intervenes directly, to lead the fight at a tactical, operative and/or strategic level, in such a way as to minimize human losses (recoverable and non-recoverable). In order to do so, there is need for the preparation of adequate forces and logistics (including medical) means, quantitatively and qualitatively, to care for the wounded and sick of the fighting forces and to maintain combat capability, and in terms of knowing the realities of ongoing wars, to be balanced is to know all perspectives.

In this paper, our aim is to present the role of war propaganda in maintaining both the morale of the population at home and the legitimacy and financial support abroad by hiding the real magnitude of human losses on both parties to the conflict in Ukraine. The research method is using secondary data and indirect analyses, namely OSINT and medical intelligence. In order to do so, in the first part we will present the manner and rationale of the belligerents to make recourse to war propaganda in previous conflicts in order to hide the real number of casualties or to mislead the public opinion about the real course of the conflict. In the second part of the paper we will expose the dimensions of human losses in the Ukrainian-Russian war and possible future scenarios derived from the dire situation of limited human resources available for the war effort.

1. War propaganda

It is obvious that the war propaganda of the belligerents is necessary, but it exaggerates the losses of the enemy and understates its own losses, in order to maintain the morale of the fighters and the population or the financial donors. This action is also supported by censorship (military and mass media), but the effects can be perverse. As an example, the German aviation in the World War II announced heavy losses of the British aviation (which in total would have been greater than the entire British aviation!). At the same time, the British were announcing on the BBC the real number of German planes shot down or damaged, aerial victories being confirmed with the video camera connected to the on-board artillery. Initially the Germans were encouraged by these successes, but soon it was obvious that they were not real and led to demoralization. Instead, the British, who were initially psychologically affected, when the truth was found out, had a moral ascendancy over the enemy. The result was that the British aviation, although quantitatively and qualitatively inferior to the German one, won the “Battle of Britain” and it was no longer possible to land the German forces in Great Britain.

If one follows the news as presented by the mass media (audio-visual and print media) it notices that some errors of approach are preserved. Thus, documentation from open sources (non-secret and public) is no longer accessible to the usual “consumer” of news, who is subject to contradictory or ambiguously formulated information, or who accesses the information only unilaterally due to exhaustive censorship. If for the general public this is of little importance, for the fighting forces it is important not to be demoralized by the negative news.

For the “actors” actively involved in military and political decision-making, it is very important to evaluate the situation correctly, to act accordingly and to create the context to use the “lessons learned”. Hence the importance of differentiated psychological operations (PSYOPS) for own forces, opposing forces and for international public opinion. But a real evaluation of casualties is also important for open source intelligence (OSINT) use, not for bomb articles in the press for the public, but for the real documentation of those involved or interested in current or future events.

The current Russian-Ukrainian war started as a “special operation”, with precise objectives, stalled after the occupation of almost 20% of the Ukrainian territory (the part mostly inhabited by

ethnic Russians, improperly called Russophiles), through dynamic actions with armored vehicles and aviation, as in the World War II, but gradually the opposing forces entered the phase of war of positions, as in the World War I. In this situation, the Russians built a triple defensive line¹, behind the temporary front line. The combat actions were on both sides intense heavy artillery duels, aerial bombardment, especially with drones and missiles, as well as tactical attacks at the subunit level, as well as by false attacks. Military forces, energy objectives, strategic nodes, critical national infrastructures were targeted in particular, in order to reduce the capacity of the Ukrainian army and the morale of the population, as NATO had done in Yugoslavia in 1999.

The air superiority of the Russians prevented the Ukrainian Air Force from acting in support of the ground troops. Conversely, at sea, the attack by Ukrainian aerial drones (supplied by Turkey) and naval drones (supplied by the UK) sank several ships and caused the Russian Black Sea Fleet to virtually abandon the naval base in Crimea and retreat to Novorossiysk. From a strategic point of view, the Ukrainians attacked the Kerch bridges, the port of Sevastopol, some military airports in Russia, military and civilian ships in the Black Sea, logistics hubs, etc.

The Russian winter offensive in 2023 has been a partial success, managing to occupy part of the claimed territory, and the Ukrainian summer counter-offensive has been a partial failure, only managing to block the enemy's advance and free some parts of territory. The resumption of the winter offensive in 2024 is expected on both sides, which would present advantages and disadvantages for each belligerent, but also an increase in human losses due to the difficult weather conditions.

2. Russian Forces Losses

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian and Western (mainly NATO and EU) narrative predicted the defeat of the Russians, praised the unexpected resistance of the Ukrainians and the inability of the Russian president to assess the risks rationally, being considered by some publications as sick, crazy or even dying (Motyl 2023) (The New York Times 2023) (Sky News Australia 2023). In mass media it was insisted that the losses of the Russians, in terms of people and equipment, are much higher than those of the Ukrainians (VOA 2023) (European Consortium for Political Research 2023), triggering a “war of numbers” in the mass media and in official communiqués.

At the war of number base stood secrecy, preserved through excessive censorship (Financial Times 2022), so that the real number would not be known. Thus, the Russians only partially communicated their own losses (Radio Free Europe 2022), and the Ukrainians did not communicate them at all, but only those of the opponent. So the estimates became “facts”. The statements made to the press by some “officials” (without knowing exactly what this term means) announced a ratio of 1 Ukrainian to 5 dead Russians, and the Secretary of the Ukrainian Security and Defense Council, Oleksei Danilov, even announced a ratio of 1 to 7 (Wilk and Żochowski 2023).

Examining the number of Russian losses, it is observed that the pro-Ukrainian press systematically applies the “mirror” technique in communication, so the reversal of the data would be closer to reality, as Colonel Jacques Baud, from the Swiss military espionage, specialist at the UN and NATO, appreciates (Janata Weekly 2022) (Scheerpost 2022). The goal is to demonstrate to the public that Russia will be defeated.

The terms used to support the manipulation of data in the press, thus, through human losses, which include dead, injured, missing, etc. (casualties) is often used as a synonym for deaths (fatalities), creating confusion regarding the time, source and nature of the figures. Thus, one

¹The first line, with trenches, light weapons, anti-tank obstacles and barbed wire, facing huge minefields; the second line, the main one, with fortifications, casemates, anti-tank weapons and collective shelters, and the third line, for artillery, reserves, command points, logistical support (medical support), logistical flows (supply and replenishment axes), inflow and penetration communication routes, as well as bypass, etc.

compares 1351 Russians, recognized as dead, in March 2022, with the 70,000-80,000 human losses of Russians announced by the Ukrainians, in August 2022, so the public is misinformed by the terms used (Tass 2022) (Åslund 2022) (Tritten 2022). Also in August BBC (UK) and MediaZona (Russian opposition) announced 5185 dead Russian soldiers, and in September there were a total of 6129 (Peillon 2022). So they're dying by the thousands, not by the tens of thousands.

These examples show that the pro-Ukrainian press relies exclusively on exaggerated information received from Ukrainians, while information from their opponents is more realistic. Yet nearly a thousand Russian soldiers die per month in an operation with more than 100,000 ground forces, plus the losses suffered by other armed forces (Ukrainian separatist militias, Wagner Group mercenaries, pro-Russian Chechen forces, Russian and foreign volunteers), who have their own human losses, means important losses. To these are added soldiers and civilians from the territory of Russia or some neighboring countries, bombed by mistake or intentionally by the Russian and Ukrainian forces, about which the Romanian press also reported (DIGI 24 2024) (Hot News 2024).

Based on what is presented here, the losses of Russian combatants would be almost 1% per month, so more than 10% per year, which leads to a decrease in combat capacity and requires not only the replenishment of the forces, but also the replacement of the units on the front and their withdrawal for restoration. Moreover, in Russia, partial mobilization has been decreed to supplement the fighting forces.

Ukraine constantly announced Russian losses. Nine months after the start of the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian General Staff announced that Russian losses totaled over 86,000 people (The New Voice of Ukraine 2022), which Yahoo News amplified to 88,800 (Nsubuga 2022). President Zelensky predicted that there would be 100,000 dead by the end of 2022. The estimate was taken over public and by the European Commission president, but for both belligerents, with human losses of approx. 100,000 each, plus civilians (Felea 2023). On December 22, 2022, the threshold of 100,000 dead Russians was celebrated in Kyiv by projecting the number "100 K" on the National Library (Roos 2022). But on the same date, the Russian opposition announced 10,229 deaths (Media Zona 2023), and the Russian officials continued to keep silent.

BBC TV, which is pro-Ukrainian, and MediaZona, which is pro-Russian, but anti-government and against the war in Ukraine, and which are not influenced by the propaganda of the belligerents, announced much lower human losses, even by an order of magnitude, and these seem to be real data or, at least, closer to reality. Evaluation methods can also be discussed, from the unilateral and unverified takeover of communications by the state and private media, to the tracking of deaths, funerals and legacies in Russia by MediaZona, in order to circumvent the war information censorship.

A journalistic investigation (MediaZona and Meduza), carried out using open information sources, provides an overview of the losses suffered by the Russian army in the war in Ukraine, one of the Kremlin's best-kept secrets. Through statistical modeling it was estimated that about 47,000 Russian men under the age of 50 would have died in this war, about 25,000 in the first year and 22,000 in the second. The last time the Russian Defense Ministry reported casualties, General Shoigu said only 5,937 soldiers had been killed. The same analysis estimates the number of seriously wounded at about 125,000 soldiers, so a ratio of about 1:3 between dead and seriously wounded (as in modern wars) and 1:5 compared to the total number of wounded (Jucan 2023). It can be concluded that although the firepower is greatly increased, the effect on the manpower is about the same, and the proportion of casualties is lower due to the increased efficiency of the medical support of the force.

The chief of staff of the Norwegian army, General Kristoffersen, told the press in January 2023 that "the losses of the Russians are beginning to approach about 180,000 dead or wounded soldiers, without specifying the source of these figures" (HotNews 2023).

The New York Times, in August 2023, published, citing US officials, that Russian military losses approach 300,000, including 120,000 dead and 170,000-180,000 wounded, significantly more than Ukrainian losses (Dumitrache 2023). Human losses (dead, wounded,

sick, shipwrecked, prisoners, missing, etc.), in the Russian-Ukrainian war, can significantly influence the continuation of combat actions in 2024.

Gathering and comparing the fragmentary and sometimes contradictory information that appeared in the written and audio-visual media, before this year, a rough estimate can be made, which, in opposition to the losses of the Russian forces, can show the extent of human losses in a large-scale modern war, carried between European armies. We have at our disposal, unfortunately, the case of the current fratricidal war between Russia and Ukraine, considered the biggest European war since the World War II.

3. Ukrainian Forces Losses

The number of dead Ukrainian soldiers is not officially known, because nothing is communicated, probably out of fear that if Western public opinion found out about the high number of dead and wounded caused by the war, it would oppose the support given by the governments of the respective states. As for the Ukrainians, not all support the war and some take refuge in neighboring countries. Observations on the ground and testimonies of volunteers from Western countries, returned from the theater of war, tend to confirm the opinion that Ukrainian forces suffer considerably higher human losses than Russian forces, and the press never publishes estimates of Ukrainian losses, in order to maintain the illusion of victory against the Russians, to maintain arms supplies (Baud 2023, 278).

The policy of keeping the death toll secret can have unexpected consequences. As an example, in Izyum, after the fighting in March 2022, when the Russians offered the Ukrainians the opportunity to collect their dead, they refused to take them back, probably to avoid having to report the actual number of dead, so the Ukrainian dead were buried by Russian soldiers (Radio Television Suisse 2022). In September, media propaganda attributed these deaths to Russian "massacres" (EuroNews 2023). This communication policy presents some contradictions, as it shows on the one hand negligible Ukrainian losses and enormous Russian losses, but on the other hand the Russians are presented as trying to destroy the country and kill as many Ukrainians as possible. But, in science, as in justice, the Latin principle "Audiatur et altera pars" must be applied.

It is obvious that the Ukrainian strategy of defending every square meter of territory by holding positions to the end ("centimeter", as US President Joe Biden publicly expressed) leads to the destruction of its own forces. It is what the French and the Germans did in the World War I and the Germans in 1945. But this time the Russians were mobile, as in the defensive in 1914, and the offensive in 1943. The result, in our opinion, was that the Ukrainian military potential was destroyed already in the summer of 2022 and the summer counteroffensive no longer had power. In this situation the Western allies compensated by supplying the Ukrainian forces with equipment, weapons and ammunition.

After British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to Kiev, the Russians feared that the West would not allow the Ukrainians to negotiate peace, with him saying that "we will support Ukraine as long as it takes" (President of Ukraine 2022), so the conflict will be prolonged until Russia is exhausted. In our understanding, the Russians changed their tactics, instead of destroying the combat equipment sent from the West, because they could not stop the flow of weapons, they focused on destroying the servants of these weapons. A new stage of the war has begun, in which the goal remains the reduction of the military potential, but not by destroying the weaponry, but those who use it. Thus, in June 2022, President Zelenski admitted daily losses of 60-100 soldiers per day, and the presidential adviser admitted to the BBC daily losses of 100-200 dead soldiers (Ukrainska Pravda 2022) (Podoliak 2022).

Also in June 2022, David Arakamia, the chief negotiator and presidential advisor, speaks of 200-500 deaths per day and a total human loss (dead, wounded, prisoners, deserters) of a

thousand soldiers per day (Lawle 2022). According to Business Insider, Ukraine would have lost over 18,000 soldiers in that operation, i.e. the numerical equivalent of the entire British infantry (Anthony 2022).

It is not possible to know if these figures are accurate, the experts of the intelligence services believe that they are greatly underestimated, and the Ukrainians estimate even greater losses of the Russian forces. Some claim that the Ukrainians would have had, until June 2022, approx. 60,000 dead and 50,000 missing, and the American general St. Twitty estimated the losses of the Ukrainian army at 200,000 soldiers (Exxpress 2022). A group working for the BBC (Great Britain) and MediaZona (Russian opposition), analyzing obituaries and funerals, estimated Ukrainian losses at 402,000 dead. During this “secret” conflict, military analysis based on open sources intelligence (OSINT) was also developed, i.e. espionage from open sources, based on public, non-secret sources, mainly circulated by the written and audiovisual media, therefore accessible to anyone who is interested. But these are difficult to interpret because each side presents the reality partially or lies in its favor and to the detriment of the opponent. The methodology and professionalism of these analysts leaves much to be desired, the estimates must be considered with caution, and the data presented are lower than in reality (Baud 2023, 280). Thus, the Washington Post quotes the testimony of a commander of the 46th Parachute Brigade (a large elite unit of the Ukrainian army) that at Bahmut he was the only survivor in the battalion and that it was completed only with inexperienced recruits (Kurshudyan, Sonne and DeYoung 2023). As a confirmation, after three days he was dismissed (Kyrylenko and Roshchina 2023). It is probably an exaggeration, but this shows that despite the losses attributed to the Russians, the Western military environment is starting to ask itself questions (Baud 2023, 281).

In October 2022, Russian General Surovikin, then the commander of the invasion forces, declared that the Russian army was not trying to carry out major operations but only to “sweep” the opponent without exposing the Russian military, and the Westerners believed that the weakness of the Russian army was visible and that the war must be continued in the same way. In November, the Swiss ambassador in Ukraine declared that Russia should ask for peace negotiations, because it is at a disadvantage (Radio Television Suisse 2022), an opinion that was also taken up by others. It seems that after the Russians had occupied about 20% of the territory of Ukraine, in the east and in the south, they had achieved their objective of invasion and went on the defensive. In November 2022, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, declares that “more than 20,000 civilians and over 100 000 Ukrainian soldiers have died so far” triggering the anger of the government in Kiev, which asked to correct the statement, which was done immediately (The New Voice of Ukraine 2022). This diplomatic incident demonstrates that the number of war dead is a sensitive topic for Ukraine's internal stability, and the EC president's statement is certainly not a personal opinion but an official but confidential estimate circulating in the Western chancelleries, and which would rather tend to minimize Ukrainian losses. The Mossad estimates the number of Ukrainian dead at 157,000, and the Turkish press supports this estimate (Hurseda Haber 2023), even though their countries support Ukraine.

As the Swiss Colonel Jacques Baud, an expert on NATO and the EU, observes, Ukrainian propaganda attributes the number of its own losses to the Russians and attributes its own losses to the Russians, as in a mirror effect. If the Russian opposition TV site MediaZona is to be trusted, there are 14,000 Russian dead, as of February 2023, and over 150,000 Ukrainian dead, so it looks like the number of Ukrainian vs. Russian military dead would be 10-11 to 1, so with a difference of an order of magnitude for the Ukrainian army, difficult to recognize from a political point of view.

Another way to approach the problem is by comparing the consumption of artillery ammunition to estimate human losses on which two sides of the front line. Ukrainian and Western military officials have calculated that the Ukrainians fire between 2,000 and 4,000 heavy artillery shells per day, and the Russians between 40,000 and 50,000, so an average of 45,000: 3,000, which is 15 times more, which it could also mean human losses about 15 times higher, if we take into account some analysis (Rice 2023). It is difficult to believe and to confirm, but it is a way of calculation, unlike what the press announces without any basis of calculation.

Another way to approach the problem is based on the effectiveness of the belligerent armed forces. In May 2022, President Zelenski declared that the army had 700,000 people (Euronews/AP/AFP 2022), about 10 times larger than the current Romanian Armed Forces, and in July 2022, the Ukrainian Minister of Defense announced that: "We have about 700,000 soldiers who adds the National Guard, the Police and the Border Guard, we are almost a million" (McGarvey 2022). In September 2022, the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung considered that the Ukrainian army is the second strongest in Europe, with 250,000 combatants (Fuhr 2022), probably at peace.

The battles in western Donbass are significant from the point of view of our analysis. Without being of particular strategic importance, the Russian army and the militia of the People's Republic of Donetsk wanted to conquer it to complete Donbas, and the Ukrainian army and volunteers (the "neo-Nazis" as the Russians call them) wanted to keep it in Ukraine, as a symbolic political importance. In the first stage, the West saw the heroic resistance of the Ukrainians and the accumulation of dead on the Russian side. Then the press claimed that there were heavy losses on both sides and that the battles resembled those at Verdun in the First World War. At the end of winter, the heavy losses of the Ukrainians begin to be recognized. In Newsweek magazine, a former American volunteer stated that the life expectancy of a Ukrainian fighter on the front line was only 4 hours (Skinner 2023). It is not known how it was calculated, nor if it corresponds to reality, but it suggests the perception of the Ukrainian fighters.

It turned out that the old myth of infantry waves that attack is no longer relevant, nor is the overconcentration of "breaking" forces used in certain situations in the world wars. These are contrary to common sense, because when using firearms fighters must be as dispersed as possible and not directly exposed to enemy fire. But what is true at the tactical level is not always true at the operational level. Regarding the attack with armored vehicles or aircraft, if they come in isolation they can be destroyed in turn, but if they attack simultaneously, only the first ones will be destroyed, according to the principle of "saturating the opponent's defense", and the others will fulfill their mission. The fact that the Ukrainian army received modern weapons, staggered in small quantities, facilitated its destruction on the front, not being able to achieve a critical mass for the realization of the principle of saturation.

4. Ukraine population losses

Since the war is taking place on the territory of Ukraine, it is obvious that there are human and material losses among civilians as well. It has already been seen that there are important human losses, "collateral victims", which are not missing even in the so-called "surgical" military actions, recognized as having caused tens of thousands of victims. However, a month after the start of the invasion, the Russian ambassador to Switzerland, Ghenadi Gatilov, declared on RTS that the Russian troops are making efforts to carry out the operation "delicately" (G4Media 2022) seeking to minimize collateral losses, being mocked by journalists. However, on the same day, in the American magazine Newsweek, an analyst from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA, the American military espionage) declares that: "[...] (the Russians) do not intentionally attack civilians, that they are probably aware

that they have to limit the damage, to leave an exit door for negotiations” (Arkin 2022). The objectives announced by the Russians were not to occupy or destroy the country, but to remove the threat to Donbas, so the attacks were not preceded by massive bombings affecting the population, as they had been in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Incidentally, in January 2023, Oleksei Arestovichi, then the personal adviser of President Zelensky, in an interview with the Ukrainian media Mriya, confirmed that: “The Russians do not want to kill anyone, they tried to wage an intelligent war ... An elegant, beautiful, lightning-fast operation, where polite people, without harming babies and children, liquidated a few resistances. And not really eliminate them, but proposing them to surrender, desert, understand, etc. They didn’t want to kill anyone. It was enough to sign a waiver” (Mriya 2023). As a result, he was soon removed from office.

The reality shows that human losses of all kinds have created a significant shortage of forces. Military leaders plan to mobilize hundreds of thousands of men and women, according to President Zelensky’s statement at his year-end press conference on December 19, 2023. Ukrainian military wants more troops, even 500,000 (!), but it is not easy to be achieved, due to the reduction of the demographic base and the corruption related to incorporation in 2023, “Conscription and corruption issues in 2023 revealed a lot” (The Daily Digest 2023).

It can be seen that the media sometimes amplify or even contradict the statements of Ukrainian officials, propagating hate messages, prohibited by the Munich Charter. But the same mass media had not reacted to the civilian victims in Donbas, in the period 2014–2022, or many others. Perhaps if they had done it, this criminal military intervention would not have come to this.

The population was affected by the living conditions (worsened by Russian attacks) and the risk inherent in the war, and a significant part took refuge within the country or in neighboring countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner, by January 2023, over 5 million Ukrainians were refugees in neighboring countries, more than half in Russia, the rest in the EU, Moldova, Belarus, etc. (Baud 2023, 278) This has drastically reduced the recruitment base for the army and the economic capacity of Ukraine, and the press publishes much higher data than the official ones, it is not clear for what purpose.

5. Possible way ahead

The Ukrainian counter-offensive was also expected in the summer of 2023, and the Ukrainian army had been mobilized for the war, the first weapons and ammunition (Soviet-type from the former socialist countries and NATO-type from the other allies), foreign volunteers with combat experience, huge funding and political support, had up-to-date information and NATO military leadership through American and British strategists and tacticians. Only in the spring of 2023, what could no longer be called a counteroffensive, but the *Ukrainian offensive*, which became somewhat more active in the summer and continued into the fall, began timidly and with many delays with some local successes. In general, they were small tactical attacks, at subunit level, with armored and artillery support, but without air support because they had lost air supremacy. With the start of the autumn rains, the offensive slowed down and practically stopped, around December 1, 2023, with the promise that there will be a *winter offensive*. But due to the huge human and material losses (in fact of both belligerents) and the high consumption of ammunition, especially heavy artillery projectiles, rockets, drones, etc., it was obvious that it would no longer be possible and that the promises were unrealistic.

However, the tactics, operations and strategy of the NATO regulations, which provide for expeditionary actions (close to “Blitzkrieg”), would not have worked as well in a classic war of position, with classic fronts, with the total length of over 1,000 km, as the situation was and how the Ukrainian military were prepared, theoretically and practically. This difference in approach would have led to some contradictions between the Ukrainian commanders, between them and the allies, but also between the military leadership and the political leadership of the country, also expressed through the interview of General Zalujnii, the former chief of staff of

the Ukrainian army. In fact, such contradictions had also existed in the Russian forces, manifested by the criticism of General Surovikin (nicknamed “Armageddon” after the activity in Syria) and the revolt of the Wagner mercenaries, which were quickly suppressed. As a result, American and European support decreased, going as far as stopping the financing of the war through the US Congress and transferring responsibility to the EU, which is also not doing very well from this point of view. Probably, Romania also acquired a key role, politically, militarily and economically, in this conjuncture. But it seems that the promise of support “as long as needed” has come to an end, and it should be noted that the Ukrainians were not misled, as no one mentioned *victory* or *peace*, only *need*, a term that does not commit to anything concrete. Therefore, it is likely that soon the weakened Ukrainian forces will be unable to continue the fight, and if the Russians launch the winter offensive, they could achieve victory on the battlefield. The attacks and bombings over the winter holidays seem to confirm this. In this situation, undesirable for the alliance, in our opinion, two main scenarios can be seen.

A predominantly military scenario, involving a last major effort to support Ukraine, materially and financially, and the provision of ultramodern weaponry (which until now has been missing from the battlefield): F16 and F18 planes (which also have nuclear capabilities), “stealth bombers”, latest generation missiles, modern tanks (Abrams was promised, but did not arrive at the front), etc. It is true that the Ukrainian military does not know how to use them and has no time to learn, but as was done in many other wars of the 20th century. The risk would be that even these would not influence the situation on the front, and some could fall into the hands of the enemy who will also modernize their combat technique by copying or for means of protection.

Another scenario, predominantly political, would consist in the conclusion of peace or at least an armistice for humanitarian reasons, possibly with some sacrifices, but which would prevent the opponent from achieving victory. The political solution would be presented in the media as a victory for the international community, allowing criticism of the winner, from all points of view and the optimized presentation of the situation. This would allow the permanence of a *frozen source of conflict*, which can be reactivated at any time, with adequate forces and means to achieve a real victory. The advantage would be the reduced financial, material and human cost, so it would have more chances of success.

Conclusions

War propaganda is used to avoid showing the real casualties and destruction in order for the combatants and population not to lose morale and for their finance supporters to continue deliver capital and weapons to fuel a part of the other in the conflict.

Human losses are inherent in any war: dead, wounded, shipwrecked, missing, prisoners, etc. as well as refugees. They can influence the fighting capacity of the army and the resilience of the population, therefore, the politicians of the countries involved in war try to keep the real data secret. But for military planners, the real data must be known, for lessons learned, which can change the military art at tactical, operative and strategic level.

For orientation in this field, we studied the OSINT documents available up to now on the Russian-Ukrainian war and tried to present a realistic synthesis. It turned out that human losses in modern warfare are very high, comparable to those of the World Wars, but not higher, as we would have expected because of modern weaponry, with greater accuracy, hit and explosive power, so in theory more effective, but which is not even more effective. Still, for the Russian-Ukrainian war, given the nature of the conflict, the bulk of the casualties are from the crews of destroyed vehicles and equipment, but also from indiscriminate attacks over population.

Another important conclusion of the Russian-Ukrainian war is that the proportion of dead in the total number of wounded is lower, because the military health service of both belligerents is more efficient, having the forces, means and appropriate procedures for caring for the wounded, so mortality is significantly reduced.

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ANALYSING RESERVE FORCES AS AN ENABLER FACTOR FOR ACTIVE MILITARY

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Abstract: *The continuum degradation of the international security environment represents a negative effect of the unbalanced power that followed the end of the Cold War. With only one superpower controlling the international order it is almost impossible to prevent and manage numerous crisis and conflicts which happened all around the world at any time. Therefore, the idea of changing the current world order acquires greater and greater valences in the mind of regional powers. At the same time, the military conflict evolves and is highly influenced by the new risks and threats that appeared at national, regional and international security environments. Recent events demonstrate that we have to fight today wars and be prepared for the tomorrow ones at the same time. Preparing the population for defense and, implicitly, developing a culture of security within civil society, alongside the revitalization of the voluntary reserve, are vital and the only elements that can contribute to harnessing the society's volunteerism and accessing the potential available at this moment in Romanian society for achieving resilience and acceptable internal security. This is essential for fulfilling the objective of a possible regeneration of the active military force. Therefore, the role of reserve forces and reservists, including volunteer ones, in this new operating environment is continuing increasing and their importance inside national military forces acquires a new connotation for more and more missions. Apart for being just a human resource to replace lost active-duty personnel, reservists can enhance the resilience at national and military levels and fill up gaps or niche positions. This material will analyse how reserve forces were used in the current wars in line with new security environment paradigm and will propose some real ways ahead for the Romanian Armed Forces to develop such enabling operational resources.*

Keywords: *Reserve Forces; Voluntary Reserve; reservists; niche capabilities; resilience; human resource.*

Introduction

Revitalising the reserve forces is essential for the implementation of Romania's three strategic, and operational concepts in the defense field, as defined in the Romania's Military Strategy, 2021 – *the Concept of Consolidated National Defense, the Integrated Operation Concept in an extended inter-institutional format, and the Concept of the Integrated Joint Force - Multi-domain*. In these concepts, the relationship between active forces and reserve ones must be one that allows military actions to be carried out in the new type of conflict. Therefore, the reserve forces should be seen as an enabling factor of the military power of a nation.

In Romania significant steps have been taken to establish the Voluntary Reserve Corps and ensure an efficient operational reserve through mobilisation and force generation, but a general assessment is that we are still at the beginning of the road.

By suspension of compulsory military service and natural ageing process of the current operational reserve - those who have performed military service and have basic military training -, it is obvious that the Voluntary Reserve is an element that can contribute to capitalising on society's willingness to volunteer and accessing the force potential currently available at this moment in the Romanian society to achieve resilience and acceptable internal security, as well as to meet the objective for a possible regeneration of the active military force. This regeneration process can be regarded an element of the military resilience.

Although the Armed Forces' trust rating is consistently exceeding 70% in Romanian society, the attractiveness of the military career has decreased, primarily due to concentrated attacks from politicians, opinion leaders and the media who deny its importance. (AORR 2024) Moreover, compared to other reserve forces within the Alliance and considering the current international and geopolitical situation, Romania's reserve forces are insufficient and represent a part too small of the overall national military capabilities and the total number of population capable to fight. (Army 2023)

We consider that by revitalising and re-adapting the reserve forces, the result would be a more robust force structure with an exceptionally cost-effective balance of human potential within the Romanian Armed Forces by recruiting from civil society specialists with expertise in various fields. At the same time, this readjustment contributes to establishing a vital link between the military and society, beneficial for changing the civilian perception of the military, a perception that has been eroding lately.

The upcoming Strategic Defence Review for the next generation of national security and defence strategic documents, as described by the Law no 203/2015 regarding the national defence planning, will represent an outstanding vehicle to reconsider the role and importance of reserve forces for future conflicts.

1. The International Security Environment

As of today, we are witnessing a continuous degradation of the international security situation. Among one of the causes of this situation, there is the continuous and pronounced degradation of the state of mind, attitude, and perceptions regarding the world order. This cause is exacerbated by the erosion of the authority of international organisations that have supported the current world order – the UN Security Council, as a decision-making level, is increasingly weakened and sometimes blocked –, the selective and partial application of international law, norms, and conventions with an impact on ensuring international security order, and often only rhetorical, the erosion of international politics and diplomacy, their relegation to a secondary level. Other causes refer to the application of force and coercion as the first measures, the emergence of conflict hotspots and ongoing conflicts, as well as the reconfiguration of the security architecture in Europe (Ukraine, Balkans), the Middle East (Israel), Africa (Sahel), the Far East (China, Japan, South Korea, India, South China Sea). In addition, there is a perception of permissiveness in international relations, bloc discipline has decreased and is relative, freedom has turned into libertinism, and if you have the courage, you can obtain advantages and bypass international law. (Orzeată 2023)

Regarding the causes that have contributed to the degradation of the international security environment, we can add the decrease in the appetite for cooperation, replaced by a sense of fear of cooperation and collaboration, fear of partners, and last but not least, rifts in security structures due to partisan positions and local national interests – see the positions of Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, and Turkey – EU and NATO member countries.

The balance of power from the Cold War period no longer exists, and the statement by realist theorists that "*world order is ensured by the balance of power and resources*" tends to

become correct. We are witnessing an increase in the appetite for armament, the performance of military technology, and the development of military capabilities, new nuclear weapons, and new weapon stockpiles.

It is almost clear that the positions of the United States and China will determine in the near future the lines of force, confrontation, or understanding, cooperation, given that there are new players with resources, intelligence, and strategic maturity, neglected for a certain period, who demand their rights in the new security structure (BRICS, Japan, Germany, Egypt), and their position is decisive in shaping the world of tomorrow.

2. Possible Threats Arising from Romania's Internal Vulnerabilities

Among the main threats and risks to the security of Romania arising from internal vulnerabilities, we can note one very challenging – the continuous demographic decline of the country ageing process, and the migration of the Romanian civilians capable of military efforts. This became also an internal vulnerability for the Romanian Armed Forces, because of the lack of military personnel available for positions in units, formations and headquarters, as well as in the operational reserve.

According to the National Defence Strategy of 2020, other risks and threats refer to the very low level of security culture among Romanian society; the precariousness of resources (material, technical, financial, and human allocated to the defense sector); the loss of national control over strategic material resources; the destruction and non-existence of the national defense industry, and last but not least, the misguided concepts of a part of the political class regarding the need to optimize resources allocated to defense, the defense industry to strengthen Romania's military power. (Administratia Prezidentiala 2020, 24-29)

The inefficiency of international cooperation mechanisms, components of the national defense system, public order and national security, together with the wrong political approach that claims that NATO membership provides an infallible security umbrella, led to the imperfect, sometimes even defective, functioning of the decision-making processes at the governmental level as state director. (Treaty 2023)

Major delays in the development and modernisation of critical infrastructure, with a direct impact on national and transnational military mobility in Europe, as well as the fragility of civic spirit, civic solidarity, and the demystification of patriotic sentiment among young people, have led to the limited engagement of civil society in the debate and formulation of issues regarding defense and national security.

3. Transformations in the way of conducting the armed conflict

In recent decades, the physiognomy of conflicts has changed tremendously. The complex factors that characterise it now includes new political-economic and strategic situations of insecurity, new political and strategic goals, new objectives, forces and specific means of action, a different conception and intensity of actions, a different attitude towards the adversary, different deployment spaces, a wide variety of dominant types of actions, as well as increasingly sophisticated and unexpected manifestations of violence/aggression.

The recent geopolitical developments among actors with global or regional interests aiming to implement a new world order, as well as the ways of conduct in the Russian-Ukrainian War with possible regional and global effects, and the Israel-Hamas War, demonstrate the transformations in the physiognomy of conflicts, especially in the way of understanding the role and importance of reservists and resilience. Without the use of reserve forces, the situations in Ukraine and Israel would have been completely different.

In this continuous change and diversification of the physiognomy of conflicts, we also observed the most pronounced tendency to carry out traditional military actions of conventional conflict simultaneously with the unfolding of actions related to Hybrid Warfare, elements primarily characterised by: replacing the interest in occupying territory with the interest in influencing events; abandoning the idea of the need to be physically present in favor of the requirement to control populations, to influence, and eventually intervene; simultaneously conducting traditional military actions with those falling under the concept of Hybrid Warfare. (Radu 2016, 11-33)

Analysing the major changes in the physiognomy of conflicts, especially those related to the approach to conflict, the strategy used to achieve desired effects, as well as the source of violence, which has shifted from state organizations to individuals, with populations being primarily involved, we see that this new approach has shifted the center of gravity from a fixed posture, based on exclusively military planning, threats, to a broad, flexible, and reactive civil-military planning, based especially on deployable, modular capabilities configured to achieve specific objectives at each stage of the conflict. Moreover, we observe that, overall, we are no longer facing a well-defined enemy, but a series of non-traditional and unpredictable threats, challenging to manage, grouped under the strategies and tactics of the Hybrid Warfare concept.

In these conditions, it becomes necessary to reevaluate the conceptual and functional capabilities available to address these new risks and threats, and consequently, adopt new approaches, starting from adapting doctrines and reshaping defense planning processes to organizational and structural transformation, including the establishment of Reserve Forces and their preparation to face the new types of conflict. The approach to the new conflict must be integrated, comprehensive, civil-military one, engaging all basic elements of national power – diplomatic, informational, military, and economic, and the use of reserve forces becomes essential.

4. The Use of Reserve Forces in the Ongoing Military Conflicts

The role of Reserve Forces within the national defence has highly increasing in the past years because of the continuous changes in the regional and international security environment and the appearance of new risks and threats. The new posture of NATO in deterrence and resilience also highlighted the importance of developing Reserve Forces at the allies' national level. This new posture is translated at the Reserve Forces' level not only as a precious human resource, but also as filling up gap capabilities or ensuring niche ones. It is obvious that Reserve Forces have the necessary capability to support both civilian institutions and military facilities in maintaining or increasing their resilience, especially in a supporting role.

Every NATO nation needs a good resilience to withstand and recover following a major shock, such as the unavailability of critical infrastructure, an armed or hybrid attack or after a natural disaster. Resilience is the ability of a society to withstand and recover from some such shocks and combines both military capability and civilian training. The principle of resilience is anchored in Article 3 of the founding Treaty of the Alliance: *"In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."* (NATO Official Text 1949)

The military efforts to defend the territory and the population of the Alliance must be complemented by a robust civilian training as possible reservists to reduce potential vulnerabilities and the risk of attack in peacetime, in situations of crisis and military conflict. Military forces, especially those deployed in times of crisis and conflict, depend on the sea capabilities of the civil and commercial sectors for transport, communications, energy, and supply of base, to fulfill their missions. A part of these responsibilities could be fulfilled by national reservists or by other national institutions in a Comprehensive Approach (inter-institutional).

Therefore, the resilience is both a national responsibility and a collective commitment rooted in art 3 from the North Atlantic Treaty. The individual commitment of each allied state

to maintain and strengthen its capacity to resilience reduces NATO and national vulnerability. Each NATO state must be sufficiently robust and adaptable to cope and address the entire spectrum of crises and military operations envisaged in the Alliance Strategic Concept.

It is well known from history that countries with shorter/short duration military service rely on the mobilisation of the reserve when they come under attack.

This was the case of Ukrainian Armed Forces, which used a Scandinavian system of smaller reserve, tailored at 11,000 men by 2011. The mentioned Scandinavian system was adopted after the Cold War, when all Nordic countries downsized their Armed Forces, dropped their defence budgets and abandoned the traditional doctrine for territorial defence. They kept a small reserve force of up to 21,000 men and women in the so-called volunteer home guard. This was because an armed invasion was no longer viewed as a credible threat. (Hedlund 2019)

The 2014 crisis changed the military leadership view on reserve and Kiev created the National Guard of up to 60,000 men to incorporate both the ‘volunteers’ battalions and the Territorial Defence Forces (25-28 brigades). (Lemercier and Regnier 2023, 3-5) After the Russian invasion of its territory, Ukraine declared the Martial Law and called up reservists to deal with direct aggression of a larger and heavily equipped enemy. The Ukrainian reservists’ motivation was very clear – to defend their homes, the lives of their families, their property and hopes for the future. This is why, the successful mobilisation of the Ukrainian Reserve Forces has provided a valuable military lesson from at least two perspectives. Firstly, having a strategic reserve force is useful in the context of a defensive and prolonged war. Secondly, its motivation is high and its warfighting capability should not be underestimated. (Velasco 2022)

On the other hand, Russian reservists were in a different situation. At the beginning of the invasion, Kremlin had no intent to mobilise its reservists. This is why President Vladimir Putin called the invasion not a war, but a “*Special Military Operation*”. Seven months later, as the operation did not fulfil its expectations, the Russian President was obliged to declare the partial mobilisation in the Russian Federation through the Decree no 647 from 21 September 2022, calling under arms 300,000 young citizens, representing 4% of the Russian labor force. (Cancian 2022) The little interest in fighting in this war, combined with the lack of real information on the situation in the field, the idea of engaging in combat with outdated weaponry, inherited from the Soviet era, and the poor bureaucracy unready to handle the demands of a complex mobilisation effort, had two peculiar consequences.

The first consisted of a massive line of people trying to flee the country to avoid being drafted into military service. The second one was represented by a series of demonstrations in some Russian big cities against the idea of calling young people at arms and sending them in an unwilling war. In addition to bureaucratic problems, security forces seemed to be threatening demonstrators with mobilization, contrary to the announced policy.

This is why, the Russian case is considered a bad example, because mounting an invasion on the back of Reserve Forces sends a message of weakness and improvisation to the outside world and provokes confusion at home. This can be highly counterproductive to sustaining the war and dangerous for Kremlin’s political stability. (Velasco 2022)

A second relevant example is represented by the current Israel – Hamas War, from October 2023. Following the Hamas “AL-AQSA FLOOD” terrorist attack, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) immediately launched the “SWORDS OF IRON” Counterterrorist Campaign in the Gaza Strip.

The IDF campaign comprised two distinct operations – a shaping one to counter the Hamas strategic surprise and the “failure of information” through airstrikes, artillery fire and limited ground attacks on the northern Gaza Strip, while defending against Hamas rockets and cutting off the enclave's supply of electricity, food and fuel, and a land operation, which can be considered decisive operation, launched on 26 October 2023 towards Gaza City and the Northern Gaza Strip, with the declared operational objective of destroying the vast network of

Hamas tunnels – "Gaza Metro" (over 500 km of tunnels dug under the Gaza Strip). To achieve this operational objective and rescue hostages suspected of being held in the tunnels, the IDF has mobilised some 350,000 reservists (4% of total population) and used special "Oletz" trained dog units and "Yahalom" tunnel locating and destruction units. (Hassan and Taylor 2023)

This largest mobilisation since the Yom Kippur War of 1973 showed, as lesson identified, the importance of time and speed in bringing so many reservists at once. Israel's army relies on an enormous reserve contingent, made up of citizens who have completed their compulsory national service which can be mobilised for duty until the age of 40. (Gunter 2023) In terms of nation's "civilian military", the IDF remains unique in the world and succeeded to conduct such a complex mobilisation process within 48 hours during a crisis situation at home. A second identified lesson consists of delivering the proper training for reserve to be prepared to conduct a very specific land offensive operation against Hamas tunnels, whilst succeeding to protect and rescue Israeli hostages believed to be kept in those tunnels.

All these examples of the current use of reserve forces in combat highlight the increasing role and importance of reserve both as resources and enablers for active forces. It is mandatory for NATO member states to develop adequate reserve forces to contribute to the national and military resilience, as stipulated by art 3 from the North Atlantic Treaty.

5. Ways Ahead for the Development of Reserve Forces in the Romanian Armed Forces

Even if in the past 10-20 years the Romanian mobilisation system and the reserve were not in the forefront of military leadership attention, the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, followed by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine forced them to understand very quickly how important is to have a well prepared and calibrated reserve force to ensure an adequate deterrence and defence of the country. This concept represents more than just mobilising reservists and filling up gaps in the human resources. It enables active forces to build an efficient military resilience and help Romanian Armed Forces to actively participate in supporting the national one.

In the "2040 Romanian Armed Forces" transformation, modernisation and endowment programme, there is mentioned the development of a new strategic concept – the Consolidated National Defence (ApNC). This new concept incorporates three main components – defence of the nation, multilayered resilience and societal preparedness. Inside the first component there is, among other actions, one specific dedicated to reservists – the mobilisation and exceptional situations. The multilayered resilience comprises the civilian resilience, the civil-military resilience, the military resilience and the military support to civil resilience, all of them necessitating some reserve forces to act. In the last one, there is also a possibility for reserve forces to support the civil protection and the critical infrastructure protection, when active forces focus on military activities for the national defence or conduct some deterrent actions. (Vinturis 2022)

According to this new strategic concept, reserve forces could act alone or as an enabler for active forces against the majority of risks and threats. For example, against a conventional threat they could replace neutralized/destroyed active units or enhance some military units on secondary defensive directions. For unconventional risks and threats, the specialised reserve forces might be very efficient as niche capabilities for countering hybrid actions, cyber and spatial defence, PSYOPS, INFOOPS and STRATCOM.

The list of reservists with military training for the Romanian Armed Forces' mobilisation system becomes shorter and shorter. According to the provisions of Law no 395/2005, starting with 1 January 2007 the mandatory military conscript service was suspended and Romania adopted the full professional military one. What were the consequences of that action?

First of all, the lack of military training for young citizens in case of mobilization and, in turn, this will have as an effect a prolonged time for training them for combat.

Secondly, there is no legal stipulation for former active-duty personnel, actual reservists, to be trained prior to being mobilised.

Last, but not the least, from 2007 until now, the military human resource has got old and did not receive proper training and there is very little information at the military centers about the job/work migration of the Romanian population abroad.

More than that, even if there is a legal stipulation in the Law no 446/2006 about the pre-military training of students in high schools, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of National Defence did not find financial solutions to put it in place.

After the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the society attention was straightened up towards the military, repeatedly asking who will defend Romania in the case of a Russian attack. Even though the political answer was permanently about NATO defending us, the Romanian military leadership started to reconsider what should be done in order to achieve the full operational capability of all units and formations and increase the military resilience, as well.

Therefore, some positive measures have been undertaken since then. One measure consisted in the creation of the Volunteer Reserve Corps through the revision of Law no 270/2015 and the new Ministerial Order no M.238/2023.

The Voluntary Reserve is part of the operational reserve of the Romanian Armed Forces, which is organised and trained to be immediately activated when necessary – during mobilisation or special-states situations, like the state of emergency or the stage of besiege. Its volunteer reservists are the first one to augment the units and formations where they are assigned.

The second important measure was related to the establishment of Reserve Infantry Battalions as the first step of creating the Reserve Force as a whole. These reserve units will experiment how to organize, equip and train the future Reserve Force.

At the same time, for addressing the current situation in the short term, the following measures could be considered:

- assessment and update of equipment stock: review and update the equipment stock to ensure that reserve forces have the necessary resources for rapid mobilization;
- promotion of volunteering interest: launch informational and promotional campaigns to stimulate volunteering interest within society and recruit members into the reserve forces;
- reform of recruitment process: review and streamline the recruitment process for reserve forces, making it more accessible and efficient;
- regular training and exercises: organize regular training sessions and exercises for reserve forces to keep them prepared and adaptable to new challenges;
- development of rapid mobilization protocols: create and implement clear and efficient protocols for the rapid mobilization of reserve forces in emergency or conflict situations;
- enhanced collaboration with the private sector: collaborates with the private sector to leverage skills and resources available in areas relevant to the reserve forces.

What else should be done at the Ministry of National Defence's level? First of all, it is mandatory to reconstitute the entire national military reserve system. As General Gheorghita Vlad mentioned in a recent press interview, getting off the conscription system and the military compulsory service brought it a deficit for the Romanian Armed Forces. Therefore, it is useful to find something else to replace it, like the voluntary conscript service, for those young people from 18 to 35 years old, regardless gender, nationality or religion who wants to serve their country. (Scarlat 2024)

There have been multiple tendencies to change the current mobilisation system so far, but no one was finalised or was implemented with a kind of success. This is why, we propose a phased approach by developing first the Voluntary Reserve Corps, followed by putting in practice the military pre-training in high schools and universities, as it is stipulated in the Law no 446/2006 regarding the preparedness of population for war. One attempt is made in the

Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, with a project regarding a military training module prepared by Maj.Gen. (Ret.) Ioan Mancu. A second project is implemented in the Naval Academy, using the American system of Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), a leadership training and development programme that prepares full-time, college-enrolled students for service opportunities in the Navy.

The third phase represents the implementation of a policy to prepare the entire population in case of war, which, in turn will constitute a real general reserve for the Romanian Armed Forces. (Scarlat 2024) The last phase should be the decision to reconsider the development of Territorial Troops. This is a project which was discussed several year ago in the Chamber of Deputies and not approved, because of some Constitutional restraints.

It is worthwhile mentioning the important role of awareness, education, and promotion of both – the military career and the defence of the country. All of them should be included in the revision of the Law no 45/1994 regarding the national defence, which is in debate in the Parliament.

The opportunity of the percentage of 2% of GDP allocated to defense is a favorable premise for the distribution of financial resources necessary for the establishment of reserve forces, and on the other hand, the restart of the process of endowment of the land forces creates favorable conditions for the availability of certain categories of military equipment with which they can be endowed national reserve forces. One possible way to achieve this aim is by revising the Defence Planning Directive and the Romanian Armed Forces Endowment Plan to add a special mention for reserves. (Balaceanu and Stefanescu 2017)

It is very difficult to change the political decision-makers and military leaders' mindset on splitting the defence budget between active and reserve forces. Or to convince politicians to add additional money for reserve. Therefore, in order to address the current situation and further the process of revitalizing the reserve forces, as a first step, we consider it imperative to develop a Strategic Vision for the Reserve Forces of the Romanian Armed Forces. This document should establish the role and missions of the reserve forces, the size of the reserve forces, and the ratio of active forces to reserve forces, with a perspective towards the year 2040. An appropriate opportunity to develop such visionary document is the near future Strategic Defence Review (SDR).

Conclusions

The importance of the mobilisation system and reserve forces in the Romanian Armed Forces have been underestimated for almost two decades. Therefore, we can mention here that both currently face a series of issues, including consistent decline, neglect from both political and military institutions, and an under sizing compared to other Alliance members. There are challenges in harnessing the reserve force potential for defense, and the society's volunteering interest is not efficiently utilised. These difficulties may impact the capacity to ensure internal security and achieve objectives related to the regeneration of the active military force. Urgent measures and strategies for revitalizing and enhancing these reserve forces may be necessary.

Among the main requirements of the vision, there are some considerations that could be taken into account, starting with the provision of real solutions to enhance the general capacity and operational capabilities of the Romanian Armed Forces. This means to establish methods for consolidating national military and civilian capabilities to standards that allow for the prevention, deterrence, and defense of the country against any potential aggressor.

Next, it is important to establish methods for better harnessing the potential and volunteering interest of citizens for the defense of the country and one possible way is by identifying available and efficient solutions to strengthen the military-society relationship

through the integration of the military personnel into the social life and the understanding of the defence system by the society;

It is also worth wise, to create a mathematical model to measure the cost-effectiveness of the military system (cost-benefit, active/reserve forces, civilian/military), as well as to increase Romania's strategic credibility within the Alliance/NATO.

Within the analysis of SDR requirements could be included: identification and development of ways to form and cultivate a "security culture" within the Romanian society, as well as finding methods to implement military training for young individuals in primary schools, high schools, and at the university level, based on voluntary participation, as a priority to ensure human resources for defense.

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STUDY ON THE THREATS, VULNERABILITIES AND RISKS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ROMANIAN ARMY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DEFENSE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: *States seeking strategic superiority through technological superiority must go through a substantial organizational transformation that increases adaptability. Today, states move from technological to strategic superiority by achieving organizational superiority. Organizational transformations translate superior technology into superior strategic performance because the organization is itself a form of technology. Moreover, the importance of organizational change increases during periods of technological innovation.*

In order to face the common challenges in the Euro-Atlantic space, the Romanian Army works persistently to outline its profile in the allied plan, through increasingly active and consistent participation in NATO decisions, measures and missions, with a view to solving conflicts and crises, in different areas of the world, to the fight against international terrorism, and at the same time to the perpetuation of the military transformation process.

Keywords: *threats; vulnerabilities and risks; transformation; NATO; Romanian Army.*

Introduction

*"You can bring all the new technologies to you, but if you don't change how you think, you will not achieve transformation."
General Marc Rogers (US Air Force)*

Military transformation varies from state to state. We can see, however, that modernization was typically slow, limited, and contested in Europe. This is not to say that European militaries do not like new systems, equipment and weapons. Rather, the limitations of transformation can be seen as political, economic, cultural, and sometimes operational. As history has shown us, there are various periods when changes in technology or military doctrine seem to represent nothing more than a break with the past.

1. The objective and research directions of the paper

The issue of transformations in the military field has been a topic of debate since the beginning of the 2000's, when Donald Rumsfeld, the US Secretary of Defense, tried to make a distinction in the terminology up until then regarding changes and modifications in "military affairs". He specified the specific characteristics of the "transformation", which differentiated it from the revolutions in military affairs up to that time (*RMA*), in the following way: the transformation refers to the ability to project military power over distances long-range, precision-guided munitions, space, intelligence and submarine warfare capabilities; in the same context of the transformation, Rumsfeld also gives new valences to the concept of deterrence, at its base being a "new triad" consisting of reduced offensive nuclear forces, advanced conventional capabilities and a series of new defenses (defense against ballistic missiles, defense against cruise missiles, space defense and cyber defense), all underpinned by a revitalized defense infrastructure (Rumsfeld 2002, 25, 29).

The features of the contemporary security environment force the adaptation of the world's armies to deal with the most diverse risks and threats. These topical issues are topics of interest for scientific researchers, who through their contributions develop the phenomenon of knowing the actual situation and support efforts to identify and minimize existing vulnerabilities in the field of defense and security.

Next, taking into account my personal theoretical inclinations on the issue of the transformation process of the Romanian Army, we established as the main objective for this scientific approach the understanding of the current changes in the security environment and the study regarding the review and understanding of the reasons for hostile attitudes of some states in the Eurasian space, Russia and China, compared to their countermeasures by the Alliance.

The research directions for the fulfillment of the proposed goal aim at the following: defining the working concepts, identifying the current challenges of the geopolitical and geostrategic environment, analyzing the actions and measures to counter them and analyzing the situation regarding the stage of current and future transformations in the Romanian Army.

This research will be supported by up-to-date data, collected and analyzed through the online platforms of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), research institutes which provide valid and globally recognized information and databases and constitute benchmarks for various specialized studies in the field. but also by studying official documents and specialized literature in the field.

2. Financing the defense sector – a global priority

The deterioration of the geopolitical context, marked by tensions in Southeast Asia and exacerbated by Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, which has been ongoing since the Russian incursion on February 24, 2022, has reinforced the idea of modernizing and adapting to risks and threats of the world's armies, this being visible in the “explosion” of budget allocations to the defense sectors globally, even surpassing the level reached during the Cold War.

This trend is analyzed in a SIPRI report of April 24, 2023, which also states the increase of 3.7% in 2022 of the military expenditures at the world level, reaching the threshold of 2,240 billion dollars, or about 2.2% of global GDP (SIPRI 2022, 1).

For the decade 2013-2022, figure no. 1 illustrates a 19% increase in global military spending, with 2015 being their debut year. One can connect this trend with the triggering moment of Russian-Ukrainian conflict relations following the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation in March 2014.



Figure no. 1: Global military spending, by region, in the period 1988-2022 (SIPRI 2022, 1)

Figure no. 2 illustrates the top 15 states globally that recorded the highest allocations to the defense budget. The United States of America (representing 39% of world military spending in 2022) and China (13%) remained the countries with the highest spending in the ranking of defense investments, along with Russia (3.9%), India (3.6%) and Saudi Arabia (3.3%). Together, these five countries accounted for 63% of total global military spending in 2022.

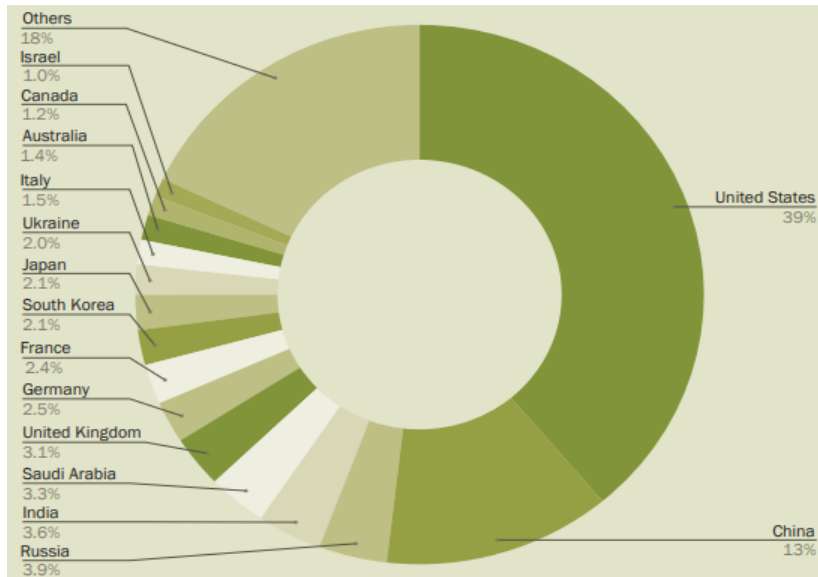


Figure no. 2: The share of world military expenditure of the 15 highest spending countries in 2022 (SIPRI 2022, 3)

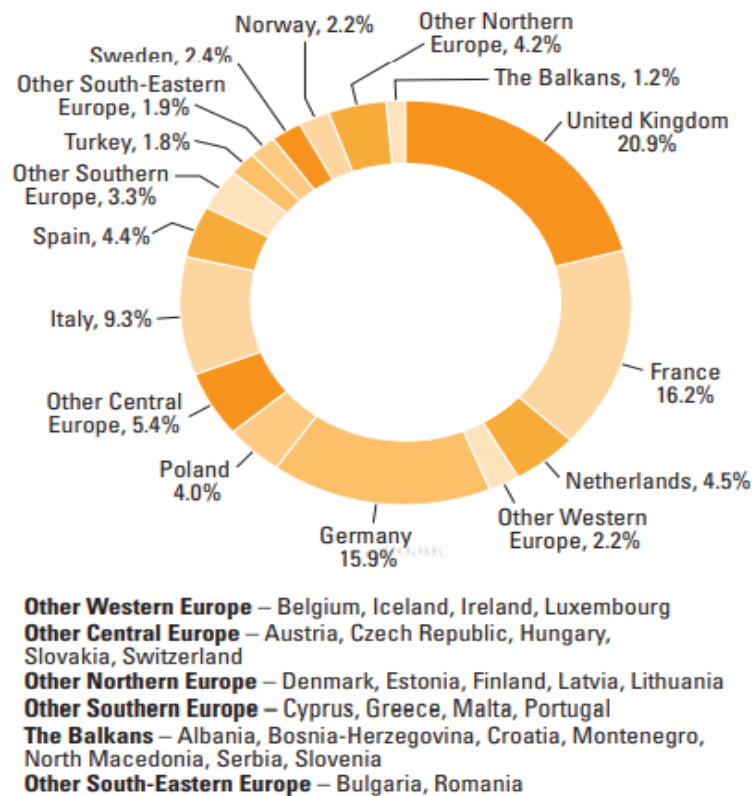


Figure no. 3: Military spending in Europe – countries and regions (The military balance 2023, 63)

In Europe, amid the conflict in Ukraine, the biggest increases in the military sector were registered by Finland (+36%), Lithuania (+27%), Sweden (+12%) and Poland (11%), according to figure no. 3. Modern military combat equipment and technology, such as the American F-35 fighter jet, are extremely expensive, and thus justify the much higher percentages than in past years (for example, the case of Finland, which acquired 64 such aircraft in 2022) (Tirpak, Finland Formalizes Deal for 64 Block 4 F-35s 2022).

Defense funding will continue to grow, says a SIPRI researcher, Dr. Diego Lopes da Silva, because many states have already announced their decision to invest more in defense since last year.

Table no. 1: Decisions regarding changes in the defense budget in 2022 – Europe
(The military balance 2023, 64)

The country	Decision on the 2022 defense budget
Denmark	\$5.1 billion / 1.3% GDP March 6, 2022 – Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen: Defense budget to reach 2% of GDP by 2033.
Latvia	\$0.9 billion / 2.1% GDP March 1, 2022 - Cabinet approves defense increase from 2.2% to 2.5% of GDP by 2025.
Norway	USD 7.4 billion / 1.5% GDP March 18, 2022 – NOK 3 billion (\$313 million) added to the 2022 defense budget for border protection. Long-term defense plan (April 2020) to reach 2% of GDP by 2028.
Lithuania	USD 1.6 billion / 2.3% GDP March 14, 2022 – State budget amendment to add €298 million to the 2022 defense budget; aims to increase the defense budget to 2.5% of GDP by the end of 2022.
Germany	\$53.4 billion / 1.3% GDP February 27, 2022 – Chancellor Olaf Scholz: €100 billion special defense fund, budget rising to 2% of GDP.
Finland	\$5.8 billion / 2.1% GDP April 5, 2022 – €2.2 billion additional defense funding in the 2023-2026 scale plan. EUR 700 million more for 2022.
Estonia	\$0.8bn / 2.1% GDP 25Mar22 – Government approves €476m boost to defense 2022–26 to boost air defense capabilities. This aims to increase the budget to over 2.5% of GDP. €15.7 million added to the 2022 budget.
Slovenia	USD 0.9 billion / 1.4% GDP March 16, 2022 – Defense Minister Matej Tonin: Defense budget to reach 2% of GDP by 2030.
Luxembourg	\$0.4 billion / 0.5% GDP June 24, 2022 – Defense Minister François Bausch: Budget to rise to 1% of GDP by 2028.
UK	\$70bn / 2.2% GDP 30 June 2022 – Then Prime Minister Boris Johnson: Defense budget to rise to 2.5% of GDP by 2030. Liz Truss pledges to reach 3% of GDP, while the prime minister was not recently reiterated by her replacement, Rishi Sunak.
Lower Countries	USD 15.2 billion / 1.5% GDP March 7, 2022 – Prime Minister Mark Rutte: The Netherlands is already working towards a target of 2% of GDP and will now consider implementing further increases for defense.
Slovakia	USD 2.0 billion / 1.8% GDP July 12, 2022 - Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad: First draft budget 2023 increases defense budget to 2% of GDP
Italy	\$31.1 billion / 1.6% GDP March 31, 2022 – The government is considering increasing the defense budget for 2022 by €1.5 billion. The long-term objective of reaching 2% of GDP by 2028.
Sweden	\$8.1 billion / 1.3% GDP March 10, 2022 – Prime Minister Eva Magdalena Andersson: Defense budget to rise to 2% of GDP November 1, 2022: Supreme Commander Micael Byden: 2% of GDP target reached by 2026.
France	\$54.4 billion / 2.0% GDP March 2, 2022 – President Emmanuel Macron: France to increase defense investment from MFP 2019–25.
Belgium	\$5.7 billion / 1.0% GDP January 21, 2022 (pre-invasion) – Defense Minister Ludivine Dedonder: Strategic Defense Vision 2030 update; the defense budget will be increased to 1.54% of GDP by 2030.
Austria	\$3.6 billion / 0.8% GDP March 7, 2022 – Chancellor Karl Nehammer: Need to increase defense budget from 0.7% to 1% of GDP.

The country	Decision on the 2022 defense budget
Poland	\$13.4 billion / 1.9% GDP March 3, 2022 – Minister of National Defense Mariusz Błaszczak: The defense budget should increase from 2% to 3% of GDP in 2023. An increase was then adopted in the 2023 budget.
Romania	USD 5.2 billion / 1.7% GDP March 1, 2022 – President Klaus Iohannis: Romania should increase the budget from 2% to 2.5% of GDP.
Czech Republic	\$3.8 billion / 1.3% GDP April 6, 2022 – Government approves plans to accelerate procurement in 2022-2024. Defense Minister Jana Černočková aims to advance the 2 percent of GDP target by one year from 2024 to 2025.

Despite these announcements in 2022, European defense spending has remained effectively flat in real terms due to rising inflation rates. Spending growth will continue in current years and will be more effective as inflation subsides. However, defense financing will be tempered by other public spending constraints, not least high debt service costs as interest rates rise.

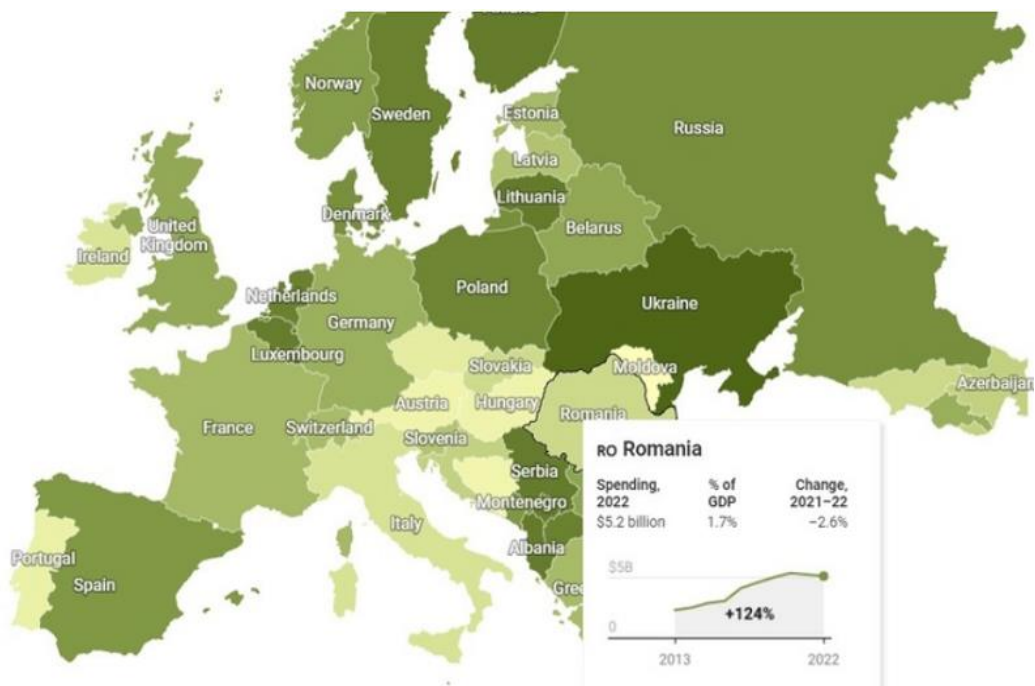


Figure no. 4: Interactive map (SIPRI 2022, 1)

Another report relevant to the topic of the article is that of the IISS, *The military balance 2023*. Against the background of the war in Ukraine and the threats, risks and vulnerabilities arising from it, the report justifies the response of states to reassess their defense priorities and effectively move of Europe's strategic center of gravity to the north and east. Underlying this statement is the acceleration of the project to recapitalize and expand the armor and artillery capabilities of the Polish land forces and the rapid increase in defense spending, setting a new spending level of 3% of GDP starting in 2023 (International trade administration 2022). At the same time, as part of efforts to close Germany's long-standing gap in defense capabilities, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced the creation of a special €100 billion (\$106 billion) fund to finance investment projects and equipment of the Bundeswehr (Heiming 2024).

In other words, Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine reinvigorated NATO.

At its summit in Madrid in June 2022, NATO agreed on a new force model to increase the size and readiness of the force and to replace the NATO Response Force. The assumption under the new three-tiered model is that the new force would be able to deploy at least 300,000 troops in no more than 30 days (*The military balance 2023*, 50). But as before, a key challenge will be turning member commitments into capability.

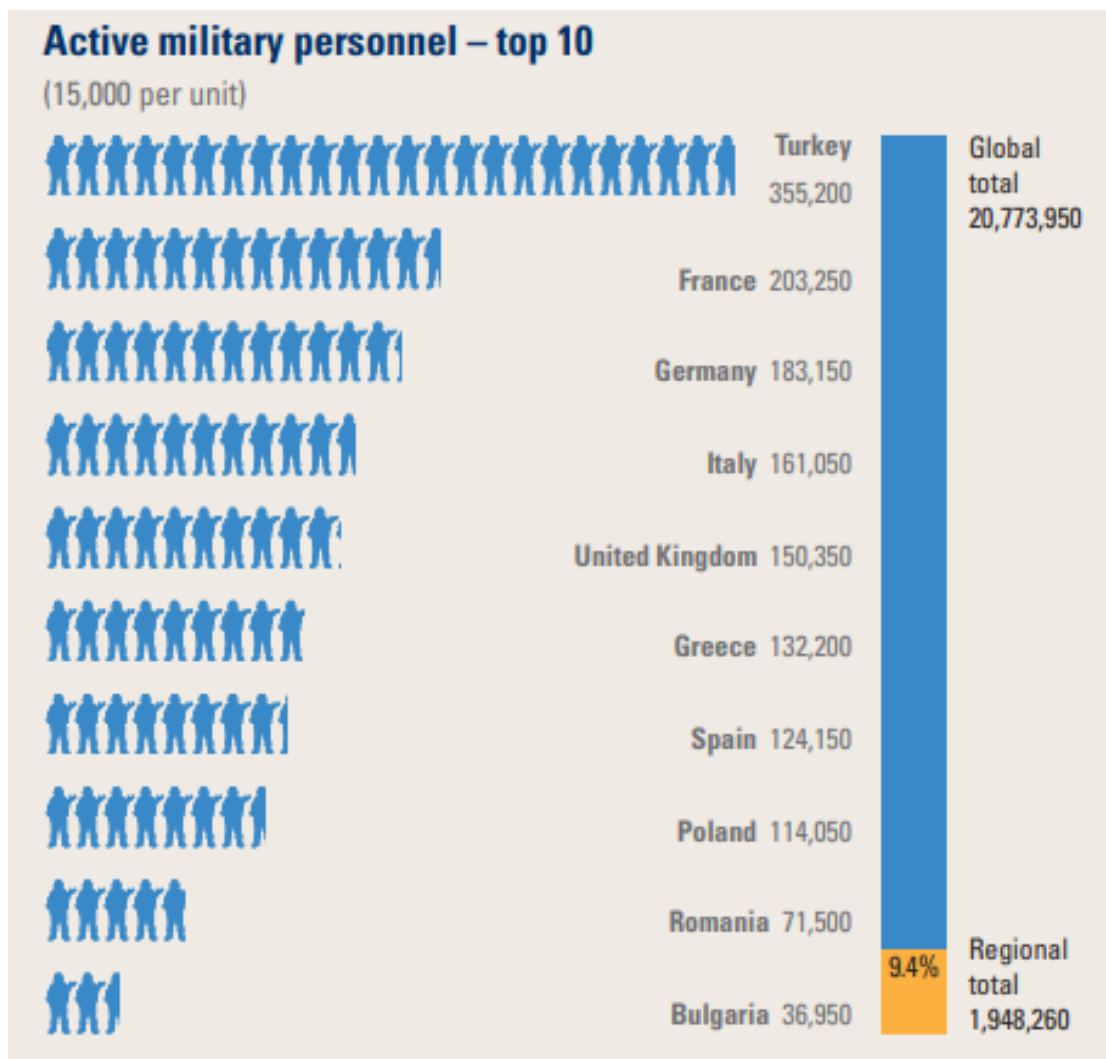


Figure no. 5: Active military personnel at the level of NATO member states – top 10
 (The military balance 2023, 50)

At the time of the IISS report, Finland¹ and Sweden were on track to join NATO in 2023. For NATO, their membership entails an extended collective defense obligation. However, NATO will benefit from Northern Europe becoming a more integrated space in terms of deterrence and defence. This means that the shores of the Baltic Sea will be controlled by NATO members, with the exception of the Russian coasts in the Gulf of Finland and in Kaliningrad.

Finland's accession to NATO includes protecting its 1,340 kilometer land border with Russia. In addition, NATO will benefit from Northern Europe becoming a more integrated space in terms of deterrence and defence. At the same time, Finland, but also Sweden, must consider how they would allow the influx of large numbers of NATO forces in the event of a collective defense situation on NATO's eastern flank.

One result of efforts to provide security assistance to Ukraine is that old equipment and ammunition are being removed from European stockpiles (see figures no. 6-8). This will be more visible in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where many states have kept in their inventories equipment inherited from the Soviet era. Equally, this creates an opportunity to accelerate military modernization and consider expanding the equipment community.

¹ On April 4, 2023, Finland officially became the 31st member of NATO.

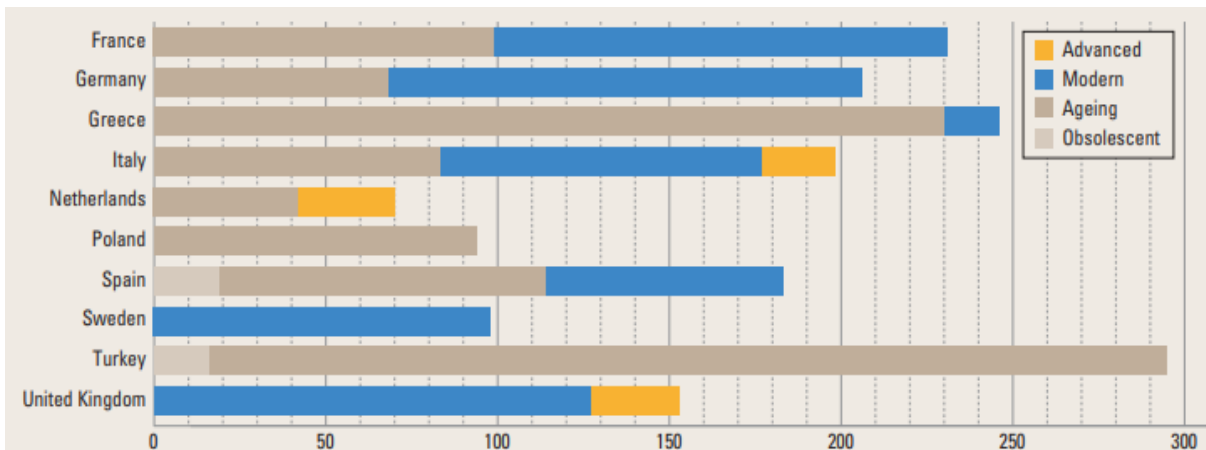


Figure no. 6: Europe: selection of tactical combat aircraft, 2022²
 (The military balance 2023, 50)

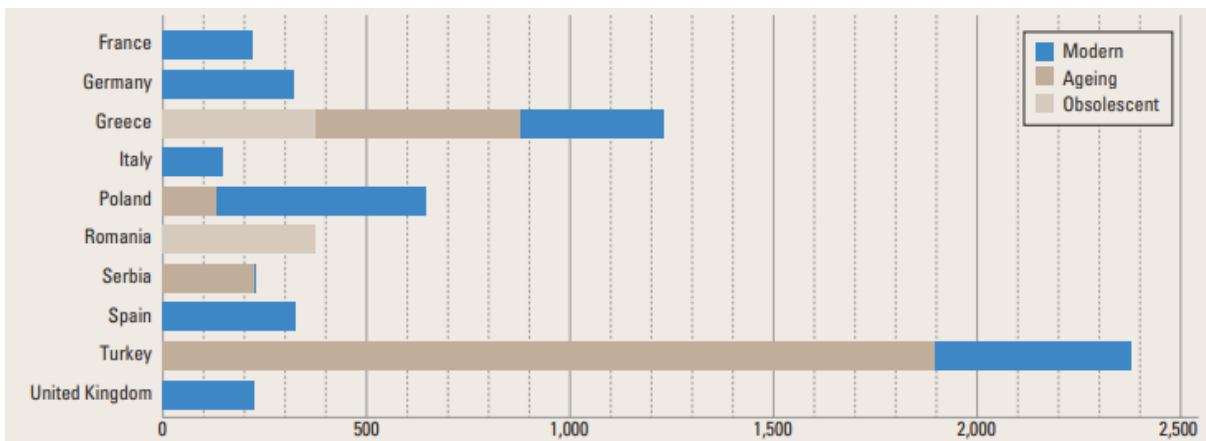


Figure no. 7: Europe: selection of main tactical combat fleets, 2022
 (The military balance 2023, 51)

Operator	Equipment	Total	Operator	Equipment	Total
Austria	C-130K <i>Hercules</i>	3	Norway	C-130J-30 <i>Hercules</i>	4
Bulgaria	C-27J <i>Spartan</i>	3	Poland	C-130H/C-130E <i>Hercules</i>	7
Denmark	C-130J-30 <i>Hercules</i>	4	Portugal	C-130H/C-130H-30 <i>Hercules</i>	5
France	C-130H/C-130H-30/C-130J-30 <i>Hercules</i>	16	Romania	C-130B/C-130H <i>Hercules</i> /C-27J <i>Spartan</i>	12
Germany	C-130J-30 <i>Hercules</i>	3	Slovakia	C-27J <i>Spartan</i>	2
Greece	C-130B/C-130H <i>Hercules</i> /C-27J <i>Spartan</i>	23	Sweden	C-130H <i>Hercules</i>	5
Italy	C-130J/C-130J-30 <i>Hercules</i> /C-27J <i>Spartan</i>	33	Turkey	C-130B/C-130E <i>Hercules</i> /C-160D <i>Transall</i>	24
Lithuania	C-27J <i>Spartan</i>	3	United Kingdom	C-130J/C-130J-30 <i>Hercules</i>	14
Netherlands	C-130H/C-130H-30 <i>Hercules</i>	4			

Figure no. 8: Europe: selection of medium transport aircraft, 2022
 (The military balance 2023, 51)

Finally, reiterating the conclusions of the two reports, SIPRI and IISS, it is required that the NATO member states reconsider the commitments assumed within NATO and allocate the appropriate percentage to the defense sector, and at the same time, the allied armies carry out a judicious management of the funding.

² “Combat aircraft” includes fighter, ground attack and attack aircraft.

3. A Romanian overview regarding the threats-vulnerabilities-risks triad

The number of threats and vulnerabilities of a military nature determines the risks that must be identified and capabilities developed to prevent the likelihood that national security interests, values and objectives will be significantly affected. As the Army is responsible for national resilience and is “subordinated exclusively to the will of the people” (Strategia militară a României 2021, 10), it uses all the resources it has at its disposal, but also constantly develops new capabilities, with the aim of fulfilling its constitutional role of defending territorial integrity, sovereignty, unity state, national independence and democracy (Constituția României 1991, art. 118).

Based on this idea, the starting point for the study on the threats, vulnerabilities and risks that interfere with the transformation process of the Romanian Army is represented by the following formula:

$T+V=R-C$ where, T = threats, V = vulnerabilities, R = risks, C = capabilities.

To explain the terms in the formula above, we consider relevant the definitions approached by a member of the Academy of National Security Sciences, Ion Mitulețu, and the consultation of the *National Defense Strategy for 2020-2024 (NDS)* and the *Defense White Paper of Romania from 2021 (DWP)*.

Therefore, in what follows, we reproduce the meaning of the notions of interest for this study, as follows:

a) potential threats to national security can be traditional, asymmetric and emerging: traditional threats refer to the revival of the balance of power between competitors with opposing strategic interests as well as strategic reassessments; asymmetric threats are related to the terrorist phenomenon, insurgency, the expansion of weapons of mass destruction; emerging threats are cyber-attacks, propaganda and disinformation, hybrid actions, illegal migration, climate change and pandemics (Strategia națională de apărare a țării pentru perioada 2020-2024 2020, 19);

b) vulnerabilities represent functional, systemic and structural deficiencies that can produce serious imbalances on state institutions with implications on the integrity of citizens and local communities (Mitulețu 2020, 31);

c) risks are probable events that affect the normal functioning of state institutions, the integrity and safety of communities and citizens (Mitulețu 2020, 31);

d) the capability represents “the ability to perform actions in order to achieve some objectives” (Carta Albă a Apărării 2021, 38).

At the national level, we can consider that our country is facing external threats arising from the growing trend of competitiveness and conflict in the Euro-Atlantic space. In addition to the internal vulnerabilities of the national defense system, we can also take into account two other aspects that compete for a vulnerable position of our territory on the “grand chessboard” of the world (Brzezinski 1997).

The first aspect refers to the dual quality of the Romanian state, being part of two powerful organizations at the global level, NATO and the EU. This double security privilege³, however, comes with the assumption of certain commitments that all members must meet. The second aspect is related to the geographical location of Romania, in the vicinity of the Russian Federation and of territories widely disputed over time (the area of Kosovo, the Crimean Peninsula, the conflicting Middle East).

Thus, within the limits of what was discussed above, we can affirm that in the triad of threats-vulnerabilities-risks, the transformation process of the Romanian Army represents an important vector in ensuring and maintaining a national, regional and international climate of stability.

³ With reference to this idea, security communities are defined in the specialized literature as a transnational region, composed of sovereign states, whose populations maintain well-founded expectations of peaceful change and can only exist where the states of the community no longer envisage war as a foreseeable possibility (Emanuel Adler 1998, 30).

The institutions and instruments designated to prevent and counteract the collapse of the security system must act in a coordinated, coherent, credible and competitive manner to fulfill Romania's strategic objectives. One of these institutions is the Ministry of National Defense (*MND*), which, through a modern military instrument, the Army, is responsible for ensuring the coherence and synergy of measures and actions with those of the Alliance, the EU, strategic partnerships and regional initiatives.

The level of preparation, training and willingness of the Romanian citizen to participate in the defense of the national territory, i.e. the development of a security culture and a new mentality, on the one hand, and technological developments and their engagement in military capabilities, on the other hand, combined with the resources necessary to equip the Army to NATO standards, constitute the basic pillars that can support the current challenges in the international security environment.

One of the objectives of the *Military Strategy* of Romania is the Reform of the personnel management system – "The fighter at the center of any strategy", which involves a qualitative and quantitative framing of the positions of interest both at the national and Euro-Atlantic level, in the structures of command and forces of the EU and NATO (*Strategia militară a României 2021*, 13-14).

As a representative of the Academy of Scientists from Romania, brigadier general (retired) Gheorghe Văduva, recently stated, 'military strategy is not just a document (classified or not) that is drawn up periodically... [but] presents the way by which the leadership of the army means to structure, modernize, equip and prepare the army, obviously, within the limits of the allocated resources, for the war' (Văduva 2021, 26). In other words, a professional Army, properly equipped, compatible with Alliance requirements, capable of facing a wide range of contemporary security risks and threats and reducing vulnerabilities, cannot exist without adequate resources.

In the case of Romania, all major decisions of the defense policy must be harmonized with the decisions taken at the level of the Euro-Atlantic organizations of which it is a part.

The defense resources qualitatively define Romania's defense policy, highlighting the level of ambition that was the basis of the political objectives and the military strategy and the imperatives of efficiency that must be taken into account in the implementation of these objectives. Romania's level of strategic ambition must aim both at protecting and defending fundamental national interests (sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity), as well as at participating in the fulfillment of commitments assumed within NATO and the EU.

Achieving the level of ambition requires considerable financial resources, which is why one of the NATO commitments undertaken by Romania since the beginning of 2015 is to ensure a percentage of at least 2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in the period 2017-2027, for financing the field of defense, from which a percentage of 20% should be allocated for the procurement of military equipment, and at least 2% should be reserved for the research, development and innovation sector (*Acord politic național privind creșterea finanțării pentru Apărare 2015*).

There is thus an indissoluble link between the national economy and the military power in terms of training and equipping the armed forces, which are determined by the level of funding allocated from the state budget, but also by a good management of defense expenses.

4. Concrete measures in the direction of the transformation through modernization of the Romanian Army in order to counter the current emerging threats, vulnerabilities and risks

Significant changes in the regional security situation, caused by the aggressive attitude of the Russian Federation, required an exhaustive review, reprioritization and reconfiguration of military endowment programs. These changes were aimed at equipping and developing the military capabilities necessary to counter the new threats, including by intensifying ammunition purchases and the progressive establishment of adequate stocks. Despite maintaining budgetary

allocations for Defense at the level of 2.5% of GDP, the Romanian Army directed strategic efforts towards strengthening the defensive capacity at the national level and within alliances, with the aim of effectively deterring and combating a wide range of threats, either classic, asymmetric, hybrid or other types.

The national inventory is mainly composed of Soviet-era equipment, which is seen as a capability-limiting factor. As we could see in figure no. 4, The SIPRI data indicate through the interactive map, that between 2013 and 2022, Romania's military expenditures increased by 124%. Paradoxically, the SIPRI report indicates a decrease in the percentage allocated to defense in 2022, with our country registering only 1.7% of GDP. In the 2021-2022 period, Romania is among the states with a fairly modest defense budget in Europe.

In 2022, the MND tried to organize a tender for the purchase of 231 portable anti-aircraft missile systems, with a very short range, valued at 680 million euros. However, the tender was canceled due to the fact that the tenders submitted did not comply with the requirements.

The previous year, in 2023, the MND focused particularly on the continuation of efforts to develop military capabilities by implementing the Romanian Army 2040 Program and the multiannual Endowment Plan of the Romanian Army. The strategic priority was represented by the modernization and adaptation of the Romanian Army to the specific risks and challenges of the current geopolitical context, as well as the consolidation of Romania's status as a relevant strategic partner within NATO, the EU and the strategic partnership with the USA.

In an article published nationally, the author analyzes a recent decision of the Supreme Council of National Defense (SCND) from October 2023. According to it, the budget for 2023 provides 2.5% of GDP for the defense sector, i.e. 35.3 billion lei, 52.3% more than in the previous year. At the same time, "the commitment credits provided for in the MND budget amount to 68.2 billion lei, with about 30% more than in 2022" (Mailat 2022).

Therefore, the author observes that the main the SCND decided to revise "The Army 2040" program, with the following lines of action: budgeting the necessary personnel of the army (increasing the number of forces with rapid reaction capacity to more than 300,000 in all environments – land, sea, air), updating and increasing endowment programs and stockpiles of equipment and ammunition, modernizing the defense industry, and adopting measures to better retain qualified military personnel.

Also, the Romanian analyst, Mailat, noticed that the SCND document provides the main security and defense issues that need to be funded, such as:

- modernization of the infrastructure to respond to the conditions and needs of military interventions at the allied level;
- updating the defense plans, by explicitly appointing allied support forces;
- developing interoperability by executing joint exercises between allies;
- increasing the capacity to carry out specific activities in the cyber and space fields;
- promoting and supporting technological superiority and investments in emerging and disruptive technologies;
- increasing national and allied resilience (Mailat 2022).

More precisely, concrete measures for transforming through modernization the Romanian Army in order to counter the current emerging threats, vulnerabilities and risks, started from March 2023, when the MND requested the prior approval of the Parliament to start the procedures for awarding contracts related to the endowment programs called "Integrated Weapon System SHORAD - VSHORAD", "Fighting Machine of infantry, tracked - MLI", "Battalion level 155 mm howitzer system", "AIM-120 AMRAAM medium-range radar-guided air-to-air missile" and "AIM -9X *Sidewinder* short-range infrared air-to-air guided missile" (Ministerul Apărării Naționale 2023).

Therefore, in April, the MND awarded the contract to the Turkish defense industry company Baykar for the purchase of 18 Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicles. The drones will enter the

equipment of the Romanian Land Forces, one of the three national strategic directions, along with the Naval and Air Forces. In December 2022, the MND and Elbit Systems concluded a contract for the purchase of Watchkeeper X type drones for the Romanian Army. Romania will acquire 7 Watchkeeper X systems, each system being composed of a command and control center on the ground and three drones, similar to the acquisition of TB2. Thus, the Romanian Army will have a total of 21 Watchkeeper X drones. The number of command centers is crucial for the management of UAVs and for covering the entire national territory. In contrast to the Bayraktar TB2, the Watchkeeper drones will be manufactured with the direct involvement of the Romanian defense industry, the contract being awarded to the Elbit company following a tender (Defense Romania 2023). Also, during spring 2023, the procurement procedures were approved for 54 modernized Abrams tanks, from the stock of the United States Army, intended for the Romanian Land Forces, together with ammunition and training simulators. These combat vehicles, which will be part of the equipment of the Romanian Land Forces, will be delivered in the most modern version of this model, which is already in the equipment of the US Army (Bâtcă 2023). In addition, a contract was concluded for the purchase of 150 more Piranha 5 armored personnel carriers, which complements the first 227 carriers. Also important is the acquisition of 298 complete MLI combat armored vehicles, which will equip the mechanized infantry structures of the Land Forces. Another crucial acquisition concerns the HIMARS long-range surface-to-surface multiple launcher systems, purchased directly from the United States Government. Also worth noting is the purchase of seven Patriot surface-to-air missile defense systems, also from the United States Government, of which four have already been received (Ședința Camerei Deputaților 2023).

Also, at the end of July, the MND launched the tender for the purchase of three battalion-level 155 mm howitzer systems, each equipped with 17,352 explosive projectiles, 324 smoke projectiles, 324 illumination projectiles and 720 projectiles inert. Each howitzer system is composed of 18 self-propelled howitzers of 155 mm caliber, on tracks, nine spare tubes, 12 specialized vehicles for transporting and loading ammunition, nine self-propelled artillery observation posts, an automotive meteorological station, three means of evacuation of damaged equipment and three acoustic research systems. At the beginning of August, MND announced the organization of two tenders for the purchase of drones. These include 22 fixed-wing Class I Mini UAS systems and 11 multicopter Class I Mini UAS systems (Bâtcă 2023).

The second strategic direction, the Romanian Naval Forces, are also included in this transformation and modernization process. In May 2023, Parliament gave the green light to endowment programs called "Mine Hunter", "Surface and Underwater Threat Submarine" and "Missile Carrier Modernization" (Parlamentul României 2023). Unfortunately, according to a MND press release, the procedure for the acquisition of multifunctional corvettes, started five years ago, was canceled in August 2023, as the bidder declared the winner did not sign the framework agreement within the terms requested by the contracting authority and there were no identified the funds necessary to declare the economic operator in the next place as the winner (Bâtcă 2023).

The third strategic direction is represented by the Romanian Air Force. In a special ceremony held in May 2023, the last MIG LanceR aircraft in the army's equipment were taken out of service, according to the decision made by the SCND, following which modern aircraft and flight equipment will be purchased (Ardelean 2023). In 2022, Romania signed a contract for the purchase of 32 F-16 aircraft from the Government of the Kingdom of Norway. Also, in the same month, the first 33 JLTV (Joint Light Tactical Vehicles) type armored vehicles, intended for the Special Operations Forces, arrived in Romania. However, the modernization process does not stop here. The SCND has expressed its intention to also acquire the F-35 fighter jet, characterized by the ability to avoid radar detection and reach flight speeds of up to 2,000 kilometers per hour. Following this, in October 2023, Parliament approved the MND's request for the purchase of 32 F-35 aircraft, including spare engines, initial logistics support, training services, flight simulators and air-to-air

and air-to-ground munitions. In November 2023, the first three F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft, bought by Romania from Norway, landed at the 86th Air Force Base Lieutenant Aviator Gheorghe Mociorniță, located in Borcea (Cozmei 2023).

In the next three years, between 2024 and 2026, the MND will start nine military endowment programs, six of which have already received the prior approval of the Parliament:

- C4I systems with ISTAR integration capabilities;
- The infantry fighting vehicle, on tracks – MLI;
- Tactical UAS systems – class I;
- Integrated SHORAD/VSHORAD weapons system;
- NATO type individual weapon system;
- Optical and optoelectronic equipment (Stage I) (Umbrela Strategică 2023).

The other three programs to begin implementation include the modernization of T22R frigates, the purchase of a fifth-generation F35 multi-role aircraft, and the construction of a European patrol corvette (Umbrela Strategică 2023).

Another concrete measures that Romania took lately in the direction of the transformation through modernization of the Romanian Army in order to counter the current emerging threats, vulnerabilities and risks is strengthening cooperative relations with its allies and strategic partners.

In light of tensions in the Black Sea region, amplified by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and in the context of allied efforts to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defense posture, particularly in the Black Sea region, as well as in the context of bilateral relations, with an emphasis on updating the legal framework of defense cooperation, Romania signed an agreement with Portugal in May 2022. This new agreement aims to expand and deepen bilateral defense cooperation and strengthen collaboration within NATO and the EU. Therefore, it creates the premises for the consolidation of Romanian-Portuguese relations, based on convergent objectives both at the European and allied levels (Economica 2022). Also, in the midst of Russian-Ukrainian tensions, a defense cooperation agreement was agreed between Romania and Ukraine, which strengthens Romania's status as a promoter of regional stability within the broader context of security in the region. This is part of our country's objective of defense and development of cooperative relations both bilaterally and regionally, considering Romania's interest in supporting the course and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine through the development of a functional partnership (Pascu 2021). Another important defense cooperation agreement was ratified in March 2023 with Poland and it establishes the basis for military cooperation between the two countries, including not only the exchange of information, but also the possibility of mutual sales of military equipment or the provision of maintenance services (Benea 2023).

Moreover, Bucharest signed the defense cooperation agreements with regional allies such as Georgia (Guvernul României 2022), Moldova and Turkey (Ministerul Apărării Naționale 2023). The agreements express the desire of the parties to modernize the legal framework of collaboration, thus facilitating the expansion and deepening of defense relations, taking into account the dynamic growth of bilateral activities and recent changes in the security environment.

Others recent important defense cooperation agreements include also the international partners such as Saudi Arabia, covering, among others, training, exchange of expertise, technologies, development of communication systems, medical services, military history, archives, publications and museums (Lupițu 2022). Also, India and Romania have taken a historic step towards strengthening relations between their armed forces by signing a Defense Cooperation Agreement in March 2023. This agreement, which covers various fields such as military training, defense equipment, technical assistance, military medicine, science, technology, research and development, marks the first document of its kind signed between the two nations (Șteț 2023).

In conclusion, the transformation measures through modernization of the Romanian Army in order to counter the current emerging threats, vulnerabilities and risks requires adaptation to the international security environment, but especially alignment with the requirements of the international organizations of which our state is a part.

With the allies' decision to increase the percentage allocated to the defense budget to 2.5% of GDP, starting in 2023, SCND officials believe that our country has all the prerequisites for the creation of an armed forces structure with high combat capacity, equipped with modern equipment, interoperable with those of NATO member states, capable of being deployed quickly on national territory or to support other allies, self-sustainable and with multidimensional protection means, and provided with a flexible and efficient command and control system.

Conclusions

As we have shown above, the war in Ukraine has caused many states to reassess their defense priorities and begin to increase spending in these directions.

Therefore, we found that Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine reinvigorated NATO. Moreover, Russia's actions have strengthened unity among Alliance members in terms of perceptions of threats, risks and vulnerabilities, sharpened the focus on deterrence and defense (supported by a new force model), and triggered applications for NATO membership from Finland and Sweden.

On the national level, we could see that MND is working on a new long-term development plan and a new defense strategy. In addition, regarding the military transformation process, through "The Army 2040" project, the authorities seek to modernize and adapt the armed forces to NATO standards. Romania's armed forces are structured around territorial defense, supporting NATO and EU missions and strengthening strategic partnerships by contributing to regional and global stability and security.

In conclusion, the measures and actions of the Euro-Atlantic states regarding budget increases in the defense sector and the emphasis on the process of military transformation and modernization are based on the main duties of the armed forces, which include the defense of national sovereignty, democracy and territorial integrity, as well as combating terrorism and contributing to international peacekeeping missions.

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METHODS FOR MODERNIZING THE HUMAN RESOURCES OF THE ARMED FORCES

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Abstract: *The modernization of human resources within the Romanian Army must be one of the main priorities set by the commanders of military units, given its crucial importance in ensuring national security. The constant increase in service responsibilities, difficult environmental conditions, fatigue and poor physical, mental and emotional health are some of the main factors that human resources management tries to integrate in a way that leads technically and organisationally to the efficiency of the activity.*

Digitisation and leadership are two distinct, but complementary ways of modernising human resources in an organisation. The purpose of this article is to highlight some methods of modernising the armed forces reporting to the evolvement of the national security policies using documentation and literature study.

By combining digitisation with modern leadership, organisations can create an efficient, innovative and adaptable working environment. Such an environment encourage a way of work where human resources to be valued and encouraged to achieve outstanding performance.

Keywords: *digitisation; leadership; modernization; human resources.*

Introduction

The modernisation of the human resource through digitalisation, motivation and leadership development and leadership skills focuses on the creation of an effective digital infrastructure and on the development of different leadership skills. Digitalisation and leadership are two factors that influence the productivity of an organisation with implications for the provision and development of national security (Kaldor 2010, 39).

It is recommended to combine technology, motivation and leadership development in order to create a modern, effective working environment aligned with the demands and opportunities brought about by technological change.

In a changing digital world, HR leaders play a crucial role in developing employees' digital skills. This includes both providing training and resources to support the development of these skills, and creating a work environment that encourages and supports the use of technology in everyday activities. Effective HR leadership involves the ability to understand and manage digitalisation and its impact on the organisation and its employees. An HR leader must be able to understand and adopt new technologies and integrate them into organisational practices to streamline recruitment, selection, assessment and development processes. Digitisation enables HR departments to improve their processes and provide faster and more efficient services to employees and managers (Kletter 2001, 6). An HR leader must lead digital transformation efforts to maximize the positive impact of technology on the department and the entire organization. Technology can be used to improve internal communication, facilitate collaboration and increase employee engagement in the organisational culture. An HR leader should promote and support the use of digital tools to create a more connected and collaborative work environment.

Career management mainly manages the career development of human resources, providing through various human resources tools a guide for human resources to map out their own possible career path, explaining the importance of each position in a person's professional development process (Iurcu and Dincă 2008, 25). Organisational development and individual employee development depend on each other and it is important that support is provided within an organisation for initiatives to progress within a given time horizon on a particular job, vertically or horizontally. The creation of a career development plan contributes to an employee's professional development and is the main guiding tool in this activity, setting out step-by-step the steps an individual needs to take in order to achieve their goal. Periodically, this plan needs to be evaluated because many factors influence a person's career path, and this path may or may not be ascending at certain times of life.

A human resources management system can be associated with a structure that allows all the specific activities of an organisation to be carried out and interact in a coherent and unified way.

In recent years, organisations have increasingly felt the need to modernise their HR system. Regardless of the size of the organisation, the development of the human resources management system depends very much on technological progress.

It is important to use the advantages of the digital age to improve human resource management. Nowadays there are a lot of different digital tools available that can help the human resource working in the HR department to streamline the work.

In order to contribute to national security, the military institutions have oriented their strategy towards the conclusion of as many partnerships as possible with national and international private organisations that contribute to the modernisation process of the Romanian Army.

1. Digitisation

The digitisation of the system of human resources management through the implementation of software solutions (digital management tools), such as the use of an ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) or HRMS (Human Resources Management System) is a complex process that streamlines the work of the department (Pynes 2009, 57).

Moreover, cloud computing systems where there is the facility of on-demand availability of IT system resources, in particular data storage and computing power, without direct active user management, lead to the modernisation of the human resources management process, based on digital transformation (Mell and Grance 2011, 307). An important role in streamlining activity at the level of the Ministry of National Defence is played by the implementation of cloud services that provide scalable services for users and can be configured according to the security level of each user and each military structure. Deployment of cloud services within military structures can be hybrid so that modern infrastructures can be implemented in both classified and unclassified clouds. Cloud computing technologies facilitate the exchange of information between entities of all types.

Analyzing the process regarding the organization and functioning of the ranking and selection system for the career development of military personnel, based on the Order of the minister of national defence no. M.69/2015, as subsequently amended and supplemented, we observed that this activity is carried out through physical meetings attended by members of the selection committees that review the files of military personnel who have expressed their desire to apply for a vacant position.

In order to streamline and digitise this activity, we are presenting what automating this process entails by means of a selection application for military personnel seeking promotion and/or advancement in rank. Developing such an application might bring multiple benefits to military organizations. The selection criteria underlying the promotion and/or advancement of military staff are the professional performance acquired during their career.

The use of such a computerised system is intended to automate the process and reduce the time taken to carry out this activity. Also, it contributes to reducing the number of documents, make efficient use of the time needed to analyse the documents and reduce the number of staff involved in the technical secretariats of the selection committees.

Developing a computer application for the military system, particularly one that involves ranking and selection for career development of military personnel, within a private cloud environment while adhering to the rules on the protection of classified information in the Ministry of National Defence, requires careful planning, implementation, and adherence to security protocols.

The advantages of such an application include simplifying the process of analysing proposals for promotion or advancement in grade. People involved in the process save a lot of time by not having to physically attend meetings and can attend selection board meetings from their own office, and documents are no longer passed from one member to another, reducing the risk of losing important documents. Digitisation contributes to a paperless working environment.

At the same time, much of the repetitive work involved in the promotion or advancement process can be done automatically, allowing the people involved to develop new skills and take on new responsibilities, increasing productivity in certain structures and simplifying certain work processes (Jones 1998, 20). A large part of the documents used in the process of promotion or advancement to the next grade are filled in and generated automatically, and the application can be linked to the RESMIL (the computerised human resources system of the Ministry of National Defence) computerised personnel records system.

With such an IT application, customised workflows can be created and the risk of missing certain documents is reduced as the application is updated in line with current legislation and users can be alerted before they have to perform a certain task via the comprehensive alert system.

Another functionality of the application is the creation of reports on the number of candidates to a given selection board, the number of candidates distributed by grade or the number of candidates accepted or rejected at selection board level. These reports can be generated in tabular or graphical form. The application might be designed to help you save time and is structured in five modules.

The IT application can be developed according to five modules - the Administration module, the Human Resources Structures module, the Technical Secretariat module, the Selection Committee module and the Interview Organisation module, according with figure number 1.

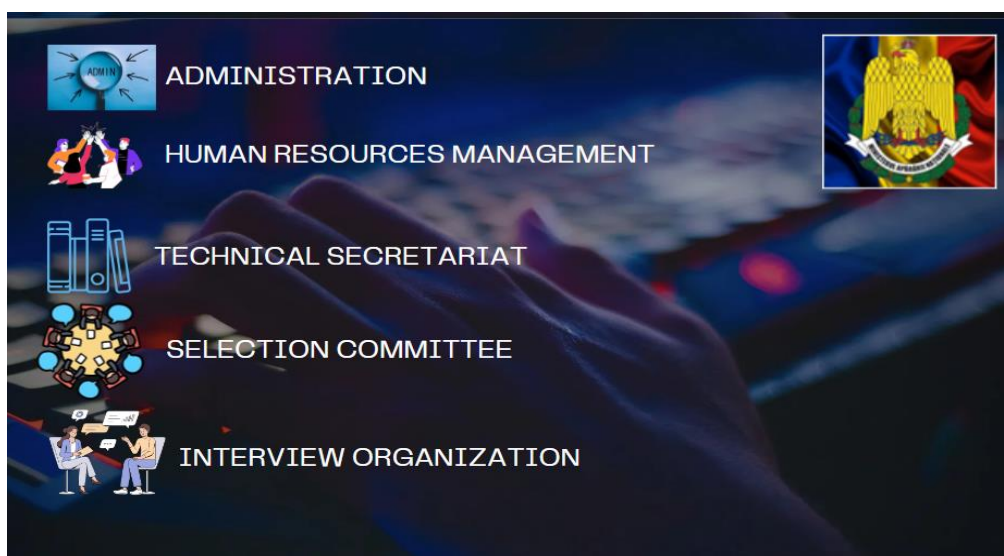


Figure No. 1: Modules of the militaries selection software application

The Administration module is used by the application administrator and is developed to manage the functionality of adding, modifying, deleting users and reporting the status of application users.

The Human Resources Structures module manages the processes related to the publication of positions in the Army Newsletter (AN) and allows the creation of electronic files of military personnel who wish to fill certain positions and of military personnel who meet the conditions for promotion to the next grade. The reports function generates the situation of candidates wishing to take up certain posts and of military staff who meet the conditions for advancement in rank at the level of each structure.

The Technical Secretariat module is a tool used to analyse the files of candidates who wish to fill certain posts and of military staff who meet the conditions for promotion.

At the same time, a function has been developed for the automatic generation of the evaluation sheets used by the selection boards in the process of analysing the conditions for appointment or promotion.

The Selection Committee module is developed for use by members of selection committees and is useful in the evaluation and scoring process as well as in the endorsement of specific documents.

The Interview Organisation module is developed for interview committees, automatically generating the interview plan and interview sheets for vacancies with interviews.

For a better understanding of the functionalities of this application, we present in figure number 2, the logic diagram of such an application.

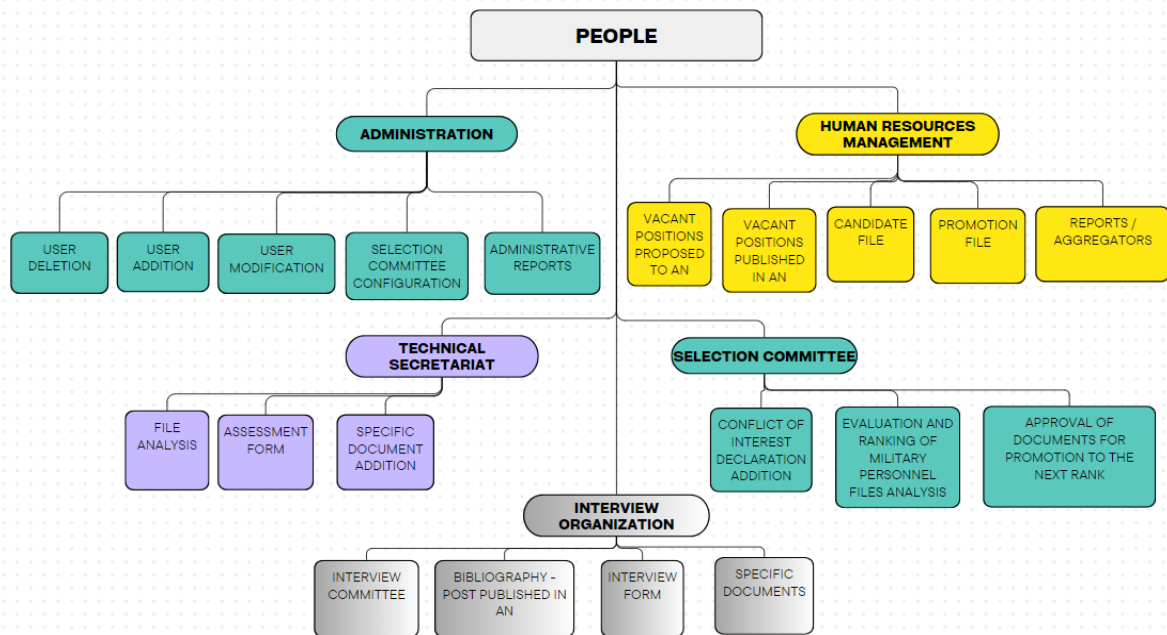


Figure No. 2: Logical diagram of the militaries selection software application

Also, a variant of software implementation can be achieved by using the JAVA programming language (based on classes and objects) which is suitable for developing these types of applications. Java's combination of platform independence, object-oriented programming capabilities, rich standard library, scalability, security features, and strong community support make it a suitable choice for developing various types of HR applications. Java comes with a rich set of standard libraries that provide ready-to-use functionality for various tasks, such as handling input/output operations, working with databases, and managing date and time. These libraries can significantly streamline the development process for HR applications. Java's robustness and scalability make it suitable for developing HR applications that may need to handle large volumes

of data or support a growing number of users. Java's performance can be optimized through techniques such as multithreading and efficient memory management. Java has built-in features for security, including a robust security model and mechanisms for authentication, authorization, and encryption (Sierra and Bates 2005, 57). This is essential for HR applications that deal with sensitive employee data and need to comply with privacy regulations.

The architecture of this application can be a standard REST (software architecture type) architecture containing three levels: Controller (link between modules), Service (saving and editing action in the application) and Repository (link between the database and their visualisation in the application).

The implementation of such an application brings significant benefits to an organisation, as it allows the automation of specific human resources management processes. Another advantage is that it contributes to the efficiency of recruitment and selection activities, to the efficient management of military staff careers with a view to promotion or advancement, and to the improvement of decision-making transparency.

2. Leadership

At the level of the military institutions, in order to be able to deal with the threats and changes that have arisen in recent times and to take the right decisions in good time, it is advisable to have one or more leaders in the team. Leadership is a dynamic and complex branch of human resource management that involves going through several steps to identify true leaders within an institution and to support them throughout their careers.

In training leaders, it is crucial to pay particular attention to their psychological preparation, especially in the context of international missions and the specific demands of a military career. Military leaders should develop a shared vision with mental and behavioral health professionals. Working closely with these professionals can provide a deeper understanding of the psychological factors that can affect military performance and morale. In the context of international missions, military leaders often face considerable stress. Leaders should be trained to build teams with high morale, even under difficult conditions. This involves not only managing operational tasks effectively, but also supporting the mental and emotional well-being of team members.

Military leaders should learn stress management techniques and be aware of the importance of maintaining a balance between work demands and personal life. Satisfactions and achievements in a military career should be highlighted to maintain morale and motivation. Psychological training should also focus on developing individual and team resilience. The ability to cope with challenges and bounce back after difficult events is essential in a military environment (Marineanu 2022, 15).

By addressing these issues, military leaders can help create an environment conducive to the professional and personal development of military personnel, while ensuring effective performance and high morale within the team.

Participation of leaders in training or coaching sessions focused on developing active listening skills is a significant and beneficial initiative, particularly in the context of preparing for military missions. Active listening is a crucial component of effective communication. By developing this skill, leaders can better understand subordinates' perspectives and concerns, which helps establish an open and effective communication channel. Participating in active listening training enables leaders to learn to provide more effective and impartial support. This is an important skill especially in military environments, where moral and emotional support can have a significant impact on individual and team performance. By participating in such training, military leaders are equipped not only with tactical and technical skills, but also with the tools to manage human relations and ensure that their subordinates feel heard, understood and supported before and during missions (Marineanu 2022, 15).

Establishing a supportive climate for military families during long-term missions is an essential part of the psychological training of military leaders. It is important to be aware of both the positive aspects, such as increasing family resilience, and the potential problems that may arise. Involving military leaders in addressing these issues helps to maintain balance and effectiveness in the missions. Military leaders should be trained to recognize potential signs of family problems and act promptly to address them. This may involve providing resources or referrals to organizations specializing in family support. Through these measures, military leaders can create a supportive environment where team members feel supported and their families are in a safe and well-managed environment. This holistic approach contributes to maintaining effectiveness and morale both during deployments and in the personal lives of military members.

Leadership is not defined by the position held, but is only a first step in the development process. The concept is that every individual can manifest leadership qualities, regardless of their position or role. This concept emphasises that leadership is not reserved only for those in positions of authority or formal power. Anyone can influence and inspire others, regardless of their role in the organisation or in everyday life. Leadership qualities can be expressed through actions, communication skills, empathy and the ability to mobilise and guide the team, regardless of formal title or position in the hierarchy.

In essence, leadership is a skill and a behaviour, not just an attribute linked to formal status. The focus is therefore on developing leadership skills in each individual, regardless of their role in the organisation or society. Management style is a causal variable with significant impact, as its practice generates various effects. The importance is not in the style itself, but rather in the results and impact it has on driving effectiveness. The character of each person is constantly reflected and communicated to those around them. The way you position yourself in relation to subordinates influences moods, work climate and dictates the evolution of interpersonal relationships within the organisation. A person's individual character is evident in their day-to-day behaviour, and the way they interact with subordinates directly influences team moods, the work climate and the way relationships develop between members of the organisation. It is important to understand that there is no single 'right' or 'ideal' leadership style. Instead, it is crucial to be aware of the impact of one's own style on those around them and to adapt accordingly to create a positive and effective work environment. In this way, the personal approach to leadership can shape organisational culture and influence the outcomes of the organisation as a whole.

Developing an existing motivation system in an organisation is one way of developing human resources. Motivating employees is essential for the optimal achievement of the organisation's objectives and for maintaining their loyalty to the company. Favourable working conditions and a friendly working environment have a significant impact on productivity, creativity and therefore on the financial stability of the organisation. An effective motivation system helps improve individual and collective performance, stimulates creativity and innovation, and promotes long-term employee commitment to the organisation. Creating supportive working conditions and a friendly working environment positively influences employee productivity, supports creative development and can ultimately contribute to the financial stability of the organisation.

Thus, modernising the motivation system is an investment in the organisation's human capital, with a significant impact on overall performance and employee well-being. It may involve revisiting traditional methods of motivation and implementing new, tailored approaches, adapted to the specific needs and expectations of the team. Employees show satisfaction with supportive managers, adopt a fair and equitable working style, while they become demotivated in the presence of arrogant and cold managers. The level of employee motivation is closely linked to employee productivity, so it is crucial that human resources department pays constant attention to the goal of motivation.

Within organisations, employees find motivation in rewards commensurate with their contribution and in fair treatment. It is therefore essential that the organisation implements a performance-based reward system. To achieve this, managers need to set clear performance indicators that are easy for employees to understand, and link rewards to the achievement of these indicators.

Conclusion

Technology is a significant advantage for human resource management, especially in the context of the modernisation of the workforce system, where employees become more productive and develop greater trust in the organisation. Implementing an ERP system can bring multiple benefits, including saving time and effort by automating administrative tasks and speeding up internal processes. This technology solution can be applied in various areas such as payroll, recruitment, selection and performance appraisal, and can also help automate or mechanise routine tasks. Dedicated human resources management software (HRMS) can provide a significant boost to the modernisation of your people management system and contribute to staff retention as organisations increasingly look to integrate the digital work experience.

Human resources work can be streamlined if employees have access to cloud services to access data more easily anytime, anywhere, with lower IT maintenance costs. Cloud computing systems can help make HR more efficient and effective.

Both in terms of digitisation and leadership, digital democratisation can be called for, referring here to ways of transformation and modernisation. A starting point is also the modernisation of military education, with a focus on digital education, the introduction of digital education subjects and leadership training in the military education curriculum. This step is primarily about specialising teachers in this niche.

Leaders have a direct impact on organisational culture, strategies, decision making and therefore on organisational results. Knowing leaders enables employees to better understand the vision and values of the organisation, as leaders are instrumental in defining and promoting them. People who share the same vision and values with their leaders are more likely to be motivated and committed to achieving the organisation's goals.

By getting to know leaders, members of the organisation can work more effectively together, understanding strategic directions, values and leadership styles.

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DISCUSSING HYBRID WARFARE VIA SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: THE CASE OF DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA EXPLOITING MINORITY GROUPS

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Abstract: *This paper argues that minority issues are often exploited in hybrid warfare, serving as both subject and target of disinformation and propaganda. The ultimate aim is to polarise society, weaken cohesion and even trigger conflict in the countries of interest to the aggressor. The paper discusses studies on disinformation, propaganda and minorities and applies the lens of social psychology to identify key characteristics of minorities that can be targeted by third parties in hybrid warfare. Finally, it briefly examines how the Russian Federation is using these tools in its hybrid war against Ukraine and other democratic states. As part of a larger work in progress, the paper does not offer at this stage a complete and tested analytic model, but signals the need for an approach that goes beyond simple debates about disinformation and propaganda narratives towards the socio-psychological mechanisms that make them efficient.*

Keywords: *minorities; hybrid warfare; social psychology; identity; disinformation; propaganda; Ukraine; Russian Federation.*

Introduction

The paper addresses from a theoretical perspective a particularly sensitive concern in the sphere of national security, namely *the use of minority issues as elements that can be speculated upon by an actor seeking to destabilise a state or group of states by means of hybrid warfare*. The paper does not aim to constitute a complete analysis of this phenomenon, but only to signal the need for an approach that goes beyond simple debates about disinformation and propaganda narratives and to identify the mechanisms that make them so efficient. Building a tool for data collection and analysis, as well as identifying causal relationships, is a long-term process whose results will be included in a comprehensive study.

Minority issues can be exploited due to the already existing vulnerabilities related to these groups, such as the failure to respect their rights in many countries despite the development of national and international legislation in this area over the last 30 years. Furthermore, historical events portrayed as discriminatory have generated resentments, which still persist. In addition, features of democratic societies such as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and of the press, can be used to empower extremist and separatist discourses. According to some studies, certain international actors employ a variety of military and non-military tools to achieve their foreign policy objectives; this approach is commonly referred to as hybrid warfare (White and Overdeer 2020). According to them, one of the levers used by the Russian Federation, for example, is precisely the exploitation of ethnic problems in the targeted societies. Since 2014, Russia has resorted to escalating ethnic conflict as a primary technique in hybrid warfare. It has effectively exploited the fears of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the Baltic states and successfully mobilised ethnic Russians in Ukraine to support its goals (*Ibidem* 32). Western societies are highly

susceptible to this hybrid technique. Although liberal democracy promotes the acceptance of ethnic differences and cultural pluralism (Sardoč (Ed.) 2021) (Agarin 2019), the perception of fairness is not determined by the state actor in question, which acts in accordance with international law. Instead, it is determined by the minority's own perception of those policies. Minorities are often victims of discrimination, internal conflict and even armed conflict, while receiving different treatment from members of the majority group and seeing themselves as a separate group (Wirth 1941, 415). *If there is a discrepancy between the state's perception of how it handles minority issues and the perception of minorities towards this treatment, both majority and minority populations may be susceptible to messages from a third party seeking to exploit the divisions between them.* Russia targets not only the ethnic Russian population, but any other ethnic group or minority, so as to achieve its goals for that country (White and Overdeer 2020, 33). Disinformation and propaganda are, in this context, non-military tactics of hybrid warfare by which a state or non-state actor can destabilise a country in order to promote its own interests which, among other things, can destabilise and even lead to armed conflict (World Economic Forum 2024).

In its first section, the paper emphasizes the importance of the subject matter by outlining the perceived security risks. Then it identifies how minorities can be used in hybrid conflicts by clarifying their definition from the perspective of social psychology. The third section briefly discusses how the Federal Russian government employs minorities in the hybrid war against Ukraine and other Western countries. It is crucial to note that this is not a case study, but rather a framework to be suggested and tested later for future analysis.

1. Propaganda and disinformation as risks and threats to national security

Propaganda and disinformation, whether offensive or defensive, by their intentional and targeted nature, constitute risks and threats to national security according to both current literature (Erbschloe 2019) (Vann 2020) (Sługocki and Sowa 2021) and institutional reports (NATO Parliamentary Assembly 2021) (European Parliament 2023).

Propaganda is intended to promote a specific point of view or political agenda (that might be biased or misleading), rather than to deceive and mislead like disinformation. Its basic definition refers to a systematic activity of transmitting, promoting or spreading doctrines, theories or ideas from the positions of a particular social group and ideology, with the aim of influencing, changing, shaping attitudes, opinions, beliefs or behaviours (Vlăsceanu 1998). From this perspective, propaganda includes not only messages, but the formation of an entire system that comprises a dedicated institutional structure, an ideology, and the means and methods of transmitting those messages. It is worth noting that the term propaganda has undergone a shift in connotation over time, although it is important to recognize that it does not necessarily carry a negative meaning inherently, but also it is neither objective nor neutral. It may pose a threat to national security if it promotes ideas that contradict the rule of law and thus destabilize the country.

Disinformation, in exchange, is widely perceived as a significant risk to national and international security. It might be a component of propaganda and it is defined as the deliberate modification of messages conveyed in a communicative process by a particular social agent with the intention of inducing desired attitudes, reactions, or actions in the target audience (Bulai 1998). This is a matter of concern for both the general public and experts in the field, as two recent reports confirm.

The most recent report, *The Munich Security Report 2024* highlights the *Munich Security Index*, which assesses perceived risks across five dimensions – overall risk, trajectory, severity, imminence, and preparedness - based on responses from 1,000 people from each of the 11 surveyed countries (Bunde, et al. 2024). The examination of the risk of “disinformation campaigns from

enemies” reveals a consistent upward trend in its score across both the G7 countries and the BICS countries (Brazil, China, India, and South Africa). The final risk index score changes in both cases. In the G7 countries, it drops from 12th place in November 2021 to 15th in October/November 2022, and then rises to 9th in October/November 2023. Meanwhile, in the BICS countries, it steadily increases from 12th place in November 2021 to 7th in October/November 2023 (*Ibidem* 32-33). The risk of “racism and other discrimination” is another important perceived risk. In November 2021, it ranked 13th in the final risk index score in G7 countries, then dropped to 19th place in October/November 2022, before rising again to 14th place in October/November 2023. Meanwhile, it increased from 12th place in 2021 to 8th place in 2022, before decreasing to 10th place in 2023 in the BICS countries (*Ibidem*). At this time, there is no available information regarding the potential correlations between these two perceived risks.

The other report to which we refer is *World Economic Forum’s* analysis of global risks in 2023. One of the most important difference is that it interviews over 1,400 experts and performs a network analysis of the perceived risks. In this context, “misinformation and disinformation generated by artificial intelligence” is identified as potential trigger for a global material crisis in 2024 (World Economic Forum 2024). Next to it, the other two places in the hierarchy of perceived risks are occupied by “extreme weather” (first place) and “societal and/or political polarisation” (second place). A projection of the likelihood of impact over the next 2 and 10 years respectively shows a shift in the ranking towards environmental risks (extreme weather events; critical changes in Earth systems; biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse; natural resource shortage). For the next two years, however, the most important perceived risks are: misinformation and disinformation; extreme weather events; societal polarisation; cyber insecurity, and interstate armed conflict. The network analysis clearly demonstrates the existence of strong two-way links between four major nodes: misinformation and disinformation, societal polarisation, intrastate violence, and erosion of human rights (*Ibidem* 7-8, 21). *Misinformation and disinformation have the strongest link to societal polarisation*, as confirmed by the respondents. The first perceived risk is defined as persistent false information, whether deliberate or not, widely disseminated through media networks, which significantly alters public opinion in a way that diminishes trust in authorities (includes false, misleading, manipulated, fabricated content, etc.) (*Ibidem*, 98). Such actions can result in societal polarisation, which refers to ideological and cultural divisions within and between communities. This can lead to a decline in social stability, decision-making blockages, economic disruption, and increased political polarisation (*Ibidem*, 97). The explanation for the two-way relationship is because members of polarized societies are more likely to trust information that confirms their beliefs, whether that information is true or false, and vice versa, trusting such information can lead to societal polarization.

Another link identified by the experts interviewed in the report is *between misinformation and disinformation and interstate armed conflict*. This is done on two branches between whose nodes there are also biunivocal relations:

- Misinformation and disinformation ↔ Societal polarisation ↔ Terrorist attacks ↔ Interstate armed conflict;
- Misinformation and disinformation ↔ Intrastate violence ↔ Terrorist attacks ↔ Interstate armed conflict.

Misinformation and disinformation are destabilising forces in any country where they are employed. This is evident in all of the cases mentioned. NATO’s definition of hybrid warfare identifies disinformation as non-military means to blur the boundaries between war and peace, sow doubt in the minds of the target population, and destabilise and undermine societies (NATO 2023). *It is crucial to identify and study the most significant aspects of social life that can be exploited in such a conflict.*

Minority-majority relations are a significant theme for debate. UN estimates suggest that there are currently between 600 million and 1.2 billion people belonging to minorities worldwide (United Nations 2024). This highlights the need to address statistical imbalances and qualitative

issues related to their rights and relations with the majority in general that might be speculated in hybrid conflicts. The issue is all the more complex because the term minority is defined not only by appeals to ethnicity and nationality, but also by all the different characteristics that distinguish a smaller group from a larger one. Furthermore, it could be argued that the utilization of minority issues in hybrid warfare could be viewed as a premise. This is due to both the transformation of social media into weapons (Singer and Brooking 2018) and the intensification of hate speech online, particularly towards minorities (UN General Assembly 2021) (Singer and Brooking 2018, 266). Hate speech poses a significant threat to the peace and stability of entire countries, as well as to minority groups (UN General Assembly 2021, 4, 6). History has shown that when hate speech is combined with disinformation, it can lead to widespread stigmatisation, discrimination and violence (United Nations 2023). For example, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights recorded more than 7,200 hate incidents reported by civil society, international organisations and the Holy See in 2020, most of which are motivated by racist and xenophobic prejudice (2,385), anti-Semitic (2,322), anti-LGBTI (1,207), anti-Christian (997), anti-Muslim (333), gender-based (208), anti-Roma (84), disability-related (29) or religion/belief (12) (ODIHR 2022).

Consequently, it can be seen that the predisposition of democratic societies to an increase in hate incidents is a vulnerability that can be exploited in a hybrid war. By definition, hate speech can be directed at minorities, regardless of their nature, and minorities can thus become targets of hybrid operations.

The issue of minorities is addressed from different perspectives, including international law, sociological theory, social psychology, and political studies. Each of these perspectives provides a unique and valuable insight into the complex issues surrounding minority rights and representation. However, the aim of this paper is to translate the debates into the field of security studies, but not in the sense of studying the securitization or desecuritization of minorities. This topic has already been widely debated in various works (Roe 2004) (Juttila 2006) (Al and Byrd 2018) (Carlà and Djolai 2022) (Jašina-Schäfer 2023). Rather, *the paper is intended to take the first steps in analysing how this process can be influenced from outside, by a third actor, to increase insecurity and destabilise another state actor.*

Such an approach starts from the constructivist premise that security is a social and intersubjective construct (Taureck 2006).

2. Minorities and their weaponisation: a social psychology perspective

Identifying a comprehensive and widely accepted definition of minorities is a challenging task. The primary reason is the varying contexts in which minority groups are discussed, including differences in their defining characteristics, the degree of collective identity, and their geographical dispersion throughout the country. There are various types of minorities, including national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and sexual minorities. They may have a strong sense of collective identity and historical landmarks, or they may have only partially preserved their common heritage. Minorities may also be concentrated in specific areas within a country or dispersed throughout its territory.

The international legal framework on minority rights is particularly comprehensive. However, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, the main document that enshrines the rights and freedoms of all human beings, does not include the term minority (United Nations 1948). In 1949, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations launched the most comprehensive international effort to clarify issues related to social groups. A descriptive study was completed, which identified over ten criteria to distinguish various types of minorities (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1949). Also, “The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities” is a particularly

noteworthy document among those that govern the status of minorities at the international level. It emphasizes the crucial link between the promotion and protection of the rights of national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities and the political stability of the states in which they exist (United Nations 1992) This connection is a useful element in security analysis. The Declaration pertains not only to the rights of individuals who belong to minorities but also to the responsibilities of states where such groups exist. States have the responsibility to safeguard their existence and identity, promote the development of their identity, enact the necessary legislation, and foster international cooperation to encourage mutual understanding and trust.

Relying solely on the perspective of international law is insufficient. *A multidisciplinary approach that includes sociology and social psychology is necessary to create a framework for identifying how minorities are exploited in hybrid warfare.*

In sociology, the main directions of defining minorities either use discrimination as a basic criterion (Wirth 1945) *apud* (Berbrier 2002, 6), or reduce everything to the statistical factor (Kennedy Jr. 1973), or define them by interaction with other groups that are similar or not (Turliuc 1996). In the first case, the limitation is that minority members are presented as victims, not as active agents in society who are involved in the development and implementation of policies that directly concern them. The second case has limitations, particularly regarding reporting rights in countries where women are statistically in the majority but do not enjoy equal rights with men in various areas of social life (see gender studies). In the third case, the characteristics of a minority, especially a national or ethnic minority, can be summarised as follows: its physical and cultural features are socially defined and interpreted; it holds less power compared to the majority group; its chances of socio-professional achievement are lower due to limited access to resources; it suffers differential and pejorative or discriminatory treatment; its self-consciousness is gradually formed by the group members' awareness of their common status (*Ibidem*, 55-56).

To truly capture the essence of minority and majority, it is imperative to broaden the definition beyond statistics and encompass additional criteria such as religion, nationality, gender, skin colour, and language. In this sense, the minority attribute is associated with groups whose norms and values deviate from those desired and valued by the majority (Perez and Dasi 1996, 62).

Our review of the academic literature devoted to the analysis of minorities has identified some of the characteristics of these social groups that can be exploited in a hybrid warfare:

- They are self-conscious units, linked to distinct traits that members share, some of which are even special physical and cultural characteristics (Wagley and Harris 1964, 10) that allow dominant segments of society and even to third party actors to induce low self-esteem in the minority group.

- Various texts highlights the potential negative consequences of ethnocentrism, such as conflict and separatist tendencies. It is important to recognize that ethnocentrism may benefit the survival of a group (*Ibidem*, 261), but it should not be used as a justification for discriminatory behaviour or exclusionary policies (Turjačanin, et al. 2017, 71). The suggestion that the minority's attachment to the state may be lacking is a complex issue that requires further examination and consideration of multiple perspectives including the one of hybrid warfare.

- Minority groups, especially ethnic ones, may be concentrated in a certain region of the country, which favours the development and fuelling of separatist feelings¹.

- Minorities may be subjected to either brutal persecution or moderate discrimination, leading to increased conflict with the majority and general social instability¹.

- Most of the minority groups want to preserve their identity and differences from the majority, even in the face of pressures that can be speculated by a third party actor with the aim

¹ These characteristics are not exclusive. Minorities can live among members of the majority, without being concentrated in certain regions. Some minorities may seek to free themselves from their distinct social identity, while others may seek to retain their identity. (Wagley and Harris 1964, 11).

of increasing social instability¹. They may also reject majority norms and values in reaction to prejudice and intolerance (Letki 2022, 131).

- Some minority groups have been forcibly displaced, which gives rise to resentment towards the actors or events that caused the phenomenon and which can be speculated by a third party actor in order to increase instability¹.

- In multicultural societies, although the effect is not strong, cultural diversity can decrease social cohesion (Letki 2022, 131) and, obviously, this aspect can be speculated by a third actor in hybrid warfare.

- According to many sociologists, hostility and conflict are universal aspects of intergroup relations, institutionalized in nature rather than being solely aggressive behaviour. The unique characteristics of minority social groups tend to favour hostility and conflict in minority-majority relations. This trait can be exploited in a hybrid war to fuel its conventional dimension (Wagley and Harris 1964, 256-258).

In analysing how the above characteristics can be exploited in a hybrid warfare, one of the concepts that can be raised is *identity* (the result of the interplay between self-perception, presentation to others as that person, and designation or recognition by others as that someone). Identity is frequently used to defend either the minority or the majority, depending on the political stance. Left-wing politicians often argue for communitarianism, while right-wing politicians may use it to justify xenophobia (Heinich 2022).

Henry Tajfel demonstrated that an individual's group membership exerts a significant influence on their social behaviour, along with their character and motivations, raising the idea of threat to identity. If social identity is defined in terms of dominance or power relations, its main dimensions become inequality and limited access to power in society, as members of minority groups are isolated, labelled and treated discriminatorily on the basis of their differences from the majority group (Phenice and Griffore 2000). Minority members, particularly those in younger age groups, are at risk from this perspective. Comparing one's social identity to that of a dominant group can result in dissatisfaction with one's own identity, potentially leading to hybrid conflict (*Ibidem*), an element that can be exploited in hybrid warfare.

In hybrid warfare, identity is exploited by both disinformation and propaganda.

Disinformation is manipulating issues related to social identity and it is most impactful when these issues are previously creating social divisions ready to be exacerbated. An European Parliament report on the impact of disinformation campaigns on migrants and minority groups in the EU shows that by 2021 there is a rich literature on disinformation about minorities in member states which is most often weaponised during election campaigns (Szakács and Bognár 2021, 11) (Hoogensen Gjørsv and Jalonen 2023). Also, propaganda is a powerful tool that political elites use to influence the behaviour of specific social groups, with the goal of altering the social identity of its members. Identity propaganda refers to narratives that strategically target and exploit identity-based differences in accordance with pre-existing power structures, in order to maintain the dominance of one group over another (Reddi, Kuo and Kreiss 2023) (Horz 2023).

A team of experts, led by Austrian social psychologist Wolfgang Wagner, has demonstrated that each group possesses a unique comprehension of social phenomena, which serves as the foundation for their social identity (Wagner, et al. 1999). Phenomena and events can be unfamiliar and disruptive to social groups. However, with the help of others and scientists and experts, these groups can effectively cope with new situations materially and also symbolically with the help of social representations. They play a crucial role, as they help anchor and objectify these phenomena/events. It is important to acknowledge that different groups may have varying understandings of the same issue (Moscovici 2011) (Wagner, et al. 1999) (Seca 2008).

Minority and majority groups adopt a certain style of behaviour to maintain or not their identity or to influence social representations of themselves. According to S. Moscovici (Perez and Dasi 1996, 64), minorities can be classified into two categories based on their behaviour:

nomic groups and anomic groups. This typology creates a new classification of societies, essential for understanding how minorities may be exploited in hybrid conflicts. Nomic groups are defined as those groups which, although deviating from the norms of other groups, propose alternative norms which make them appear in the social field as independent social groups, and each group will construct a representation of the others according to the relationships they have (cooperation, conflict, complementarity, coalition). Perez and Dasi assert that negative valorisation of a group results in discrimination against it, and vice versa (*Ibidem*). Anomic groups deviate from majority norms but do not propose alternative norms, creating the impression that they are social categories rather than independent groups, unlike nomic groups. These groups do not create a conflict. However, they do appear as posing a social problem and will be forgotten and marginalized (*Ibidem*, 65).

It is important to point out that these two types of groups or minorities can coexist or dominate each other in a given society because, according to Perez and Dasi, four types of societies are thus identified. They can be helpful to identify situations where a society may be susceptible to misinformation and propaganda by exploiting both minority groups and their relationship with the majority.

A type of society with low levels of social conflict and high levels of uniformity is one in which both nomic and anomic groups are few. From the perspective of hybrid warfare, it could be argued that this type of society presents certain challenges when it comes to destabilisation.

Another type of society is one that is experiencing objective change, with few anomic groups and many nomic groups. In this case, the rules proposed by the latter can serve as alternatives to those of the state. Therefore, if change is desired, it may be beneficial to encourage the formation of nomic groups.

The third identified society is the one in a state of anomie, with few nomic groups and many anomic groups, where social marginalisation is at a high level and there are no alternatives to this situation. In this case, it is possible for a society to experience disorder and destabilization due to the influence of a third-party actor who disseminates targeted disinformation messages that challenge the existing social order.

Finally, there is also the type of disintegrating and radical change society, with many minorities both anomic and nomic, in which the majority is delegitimised. Therefore, when conducting hybrid warfare, encouraging the emergence of nomic and anomic minorities is, in theory, an effective way to delegitimise a society.

It must be noted that the discussion we propose in this section on how nomic and anomic groups can be exploited in hybrid warfare can only be conducted at the theoretical level, as there is no complete theory of the emergence of minorities in general, as noted in the works in this field (*Ibidem*, 63). We are referring to all kinds of minorities, not just ethnic minorities whose existence is a result of the establishment of state borders.

The socio-psychologists Serge Moscovici, Willem Doise, Augusto Palmonari, Gabriel Mugny, Juan Antonio Perez, and Francisco Dasi have developed theories that include concepts supporting the understanding of the mechanisms involved in the potential use of minorities in a hybrid conflict. These concepts include conformity, power, and influence.

This paper will not discuss each of these, but it dwells on Moscovici's assertion that a potential failure of Western democracy may be the result of the gap that will emerge between the profound influence that minorities exert and the small share of authority that they are allocated with (*Ibidem* 26). The situation where the minority holds influence but not power can create a growing divide between the systems of governing people and managing their beliefs. This trend was identified over 40 years ago and can now be speculated in a hybrid conflict where influence is enhanced by easy access to media and social media.

3. A brief overview of how Russian Federation uses minorities in the hybrid warfare against Ukraine and other Western countries

With regards to the concept of hybrid warfare as conducted by Russia, it is worth noting that this term is not officially used by this actor, but expresses a Western view of this type of warfare. There are several terms used to describe it, such as “new generation warfare” (Radin 2017, 9), the so-called “Gerasimov doctrine” (Galeotti 2014) (Galeotti 2018), and “non-linear warfare” (McDermott 2014a) (McDermott 2014b). However, it is worth noting that these terms may not always have the same meaning (Ball 2023). However, for the purposes of this study, the term “hybrid warfare” will be used, based on the definition originally developed by F. Hoffman. It is worth noting that this term is used from a Western cultural perspective: “Hybrid wars can be waged by states or political groups, and incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder” (Hoffman 2007, 14, 29, 58). From this point, the definition has been refined by various authors, including Weissmann et al. (Weissmann, et al. 2021), and at the institutional level by NATO and the EU. However, it is worth noting that ambiguities still remain due to the definition’s widening scope.

From the perspective of this paper, the non-military component stands out in hybrid warfare. It is about the securitisation of various social issues in order to provoke a political response to them, but also about disinformation campaigns designed to influence and deceive in order to create disorder and polarise society. Even if propaganda and disinformation are not a new phenomenon, today they stand out for their comprehensiveness, frequency and impact, all amplified by traditional media and social media, as well as by technological innovations such as bots or deepfake apps. According to recent analyses, it has been suggested that Russia is the primary actor in carrying out such campaigns (Torossian, Fagliano and Görder 2020). Other studies have analysed the Russian model of propaganda and identified four main characteristics (Paul and Matthews 2016). It has been suggested that there is a high volume and multi-channel dissemination of information, with fast, continuous and repetitive messaging. Additionally, it has been noted that there may be a lack of commitment to objective reality and to the message consistency. All these characteristics speculate the psychological mechanisms that allow the use of minority group as weapons in a hybrid war (see the second chapter of this paper). The variety and volume of sources, together with views similar to those of the recipient, lead to greater acceptance of the message. Then, first impressions are persistent and repetition creates a sense of familiarity, leading to acceptance of the message. Moreover, since it is difficult to decide whether information is false or not, information overload causes humans to follow shortcuts to determine whether it is reliable or not, and the appearance of objectivity and similarity of messages can increase the credibility of propaganda. Finally, although initially the inconsistency of the message may have a negative effect on persuasion, it can be counteracted by using reasons that are considered convincing enough to change the opinion, such as the credibility of the source that can be quoted or only mentioned generically (“experts say...”).

With over 5 billion social media users worldwide in January 2024, which is an increase of 260 million from the previous year (Kepios 2024), it is obvious why the hybrid warfare is increasingly being waged on these platforms by largely exploiting the basic psychological mechanisms. Social media technologies enhance the speed, scale, and reach of propaganda and disinformation, giving rise to new international security concerns regarding foreign influence operations online (Bradshaw 2020).

During RAND expert Todd Helmus’ testimony before the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, he revealed that as of 2018, Russia was actively engaged in a global propaganda

campaign, with social media being a crucial component of Russian state activities in this regard (T. Helmus 2018). The report on which this hearing is based covers Eastern Europe. It is particularly interesting in that it explains the nature of Russian propaganda on social media and identifies pro-Russian propagandists and activities on Twitter (currently X), but more importantly highlights the extent to which Russian-speaking populations have adopted pro-Russian propaganda themes into their language on this platform. The study also offers recommendations for reducing Russian influence in the region (Helmus, et al. 2018).

Recently, the RAND Corporation identified seven types of content disseminated by Russia and its agents. This content was distributed through various channels, including traditional media such as TV, radio, and print, as well as online and social media platforms (Matthews, et al. 2021, xv-vxi, 19-24). The appeals to common heritage, culture, history, and interests, as well as the potential for divisive sentiments among fans, are of significant interest for the present analysis. The first involves promoting cultural, linguistic, religious, or ethnic links between the target audience and Russia or the Russian people (*Ibidem* 23). The second is based on Russia exploiting existing divisions within and between countries, whether they stem from historical grievances or current controversial issues (*Ibidem* 24). The report suggests that societal divisions, including those related to migration, LGBTQ + issues, divergent views on Western institutions, national, ethnic, religious, and class differences, are exploited by Russia and its agents. The presence of minority groups can potentially be exploited for manipulation, as seen in cases where Russia has taken advantage of possible feelings of exclusion and the existence of Russian-speaking communities. The narratives developed and disseminated by Russia present an alleged discrimination and oppression of Russian speakers in the ex-Soviet space, and also an occasional mention of genocide (*Ibidem* 41-42).

One potential example to consider within this theoretical framework is the interview given by President Vladimir Putin to American reporter Tucker Carlson that took place in early February 2024. Although he does not use the term minorities, Putin repeatedly refers to the territories of Hungary and Romania that now belong to Ukraine, which he considers an artificial state, and argues that Ukrainian originally meaning a person who is “living on the outskirts of the state, near the fringe, or was engaged in border service. It didn’t meant any particular ethnic group.” (The Kremlin 2024). Using a classic technique of manipulation, evoking an “interesting” and supposedly strong “personal” experience, Putin once again reaffirms his view that Ukrainians have no rights over their territory and denies the statistical prevalence of the Ukrainian population: “Moreover, I would like to share a very interesting story with you, I’ll digress, it’s a personal one. [...] I went to the town of Beregovoye, and all the names of towns and villages there were in Russian and in a language I didn’t understand – in Hungarian. In Russian and in Hungarian. Not in Ukrainian – in Russian and in Hungarian.” (*Ibidem*). Moreover, Putin is weaponizing the Hungarian minority by claiming that that in the 1980s “They preserve the Hungarian language, Hungarian names, and all their national costumes. They are Hungarians and they feel themselves to be Hungarians. And of course, when now there is an infringement [...]” (*Ibidem*).

It is not only minority groups themselves that can be weaponised, but also their rights through a focus on disrespect and discrimination. Another example is the intervention of the representative of the Russian Delegation to the Human Rights Council at the Geneva meeting (2 October 2023) on the adoption of the results of the Universal Periodic Review Outcomes of Romania, Mali and Montenegro (The UN Office at Geneva 2023) (Digi24 2023). He supported his view, included in the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, that the Russian Federation is “concerned about violations of the rights of specific groups in Romania and reported cases of xenophobia and nationalism” and recommends “the adoption of measures to combat racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and any other forms of discrimination on religious or ethnic grounds” (UN Human Rights Council 2023, 3, 10). Russia’s position is

consistent with its strategy of using the Russian diaspora as a tool to achieve foreign policy; we refer here to the concept of the “Russian world”, which includes “Russians and other people belonging to the cultural and civilizational community” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023). During the meeting, the Federation’s representative mentioned the Transcarpathian Ruthenians, along with the Roma and the Hungarians, as one of the main minorities (Digi24 2023). It is worth noting that, according to the 2021 census, 834 people identified as Transcarpathian Ruthenians in the region (INS 2023). However, it is also important to acknowledge that a much larger number of individuals who identify as Transcarpathian Ruthenians reside in neighbouring countries such as Slovakia, Serbia, Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Croatia and the Czech Republic (Magocsi 2022). In contrast, it is worth noting that the majority of participating countries, with the exception of North Korea, expressed their appreciation to Romania for accepting recommendations aimed at protecting ethnic migrant groups and addressing ethnic gaps in various areas of social life (The UN Office at Geneva 2023).

These are not the only examples of how the Russian Federation is trying to weaponise minority issues. The Romanian platform Veridica monitors Russia’s disinformation and propaganda campaign related to Romania, Hungary and the Republic of Moldova. Introducing the criterion of minorities in our search, we have identified 25 messages inserted in the Romanian media between 27.01.2022 - 30.11.2023 (Veridica 2023). These messages appear to speculate on ethnic and historical biases of the three countries and are mainly addressed to Russian, Hungarian, and Ukrainian minorities, Eurosceptics, nationalists, conspiracists, and bigots. Russian propaganda aims to antagonise the Ukrainian authorities by speculating on the well-known issue of the rights of Romanian minorities, as well as the authorities of the Republic of Moldova in relation to national minorities, especially the Russian community. A recurring theme is the alleged collaboration between Poland, Hungary, and Romania to recover historical territories from Ukraine. In addition, it aims to create tensions between Romanians and Moldovans by raising the false issue of the “annexation” of Rep. of Moldova by Romania with the consent of the EU. These are just some of the minority and historical issues that have been identified as being used by pro-Russian media to create tensions in and between states supporting Ukraine. The problem is all the more serious as the trend in recent years, which began before the launch of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has been the erosion of democracy in Eastern Europe (Nord, et al. 2024) and the resurgence of right-wing extremist and populist forces as a result of the multiple crises that countries have faced (from the refugee crisis and illegal migration to the far-reaching restrictive measures during the COVID-19 pandemic). In this context of undermined democracy, Russian propaganda and disinformation find fertile ground.

Conclusions

In hybrid warfare, offensive actors may exploit minorities on at least three dimensions, as identified in this paper. Firstly, minority groups may be directly targeted to create tensions between them and the majority group. In this case, disinformation and propaganda may focus on issues of group identity, historical grievances, and even alleged or actual violations of their rights that are instilled in the collective minority mindset. A second dimension concerns the majority, with messages being disseminated that promote an exacerbation of its rights over the territory inhabited by the minority (when we have minorities with a clear demarcation of the area of disposition), some alleged malign characteristics of the latter for the whole society (securitization of the minority issue) or even inborn superiority of the majority. A third dimension refers to the international community which is presented with so-called serious problems in respecting minority rights to justify intervention in internal affairs or military intervention in a particular country. In this case, misinformation and

propaganda can promote messages that refer not only to serious violations of minority rights, but even to an alleged lack of legitimacy of the majority group over held territory.

The aims are also multiple: firstly, to destabilise a country without using military means (Romania, Republic of Moldova, Poland, and the entire Western world where elections are interfered with or right-wing extremism is supported, etc.); secondly, to damage its image in the face of the international community and to lose the support in various areas (Romania, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, etc.); and, thirdly, to justify a military intervention whose real purpose is to annex territories (Ukraine). From the cases discussed in the last section of the paper, it appears that the third-party actor carrying out all these actions is the Russian Federation.

The exploitation of minorities in hybrid warfare involves their characteristics, identity, their relationship with the majority, and even the evolution of society as a whole. To highlight these aspects, monitoring messages disseminated by a particular actor is not enough. It is crucial to comprehend the background mechanisms, to understand the socio-psychological phenomena that allow an aggressor to use minority groups to achieve its own ends. Concepts specific to social psychology, such as identity, intergroup relations, influence, persuasion, conformity, and discrimination, must be included in the current scientific vocabulary of those analysing disinformation and propaganda campaigns. This is because they are crucial in understanding the complex dynamics of the hybrid warfare.

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THE SECURITY OF EU CITIZENS WHEN CONFRONTED WITH CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISINFORMATION

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Abstract: *The paper explores the evolving challenges of disinformation campaigns and climate change migration within the European Union (EU) and NATO. It highlights the urgent need for proactive and coordinated responses to safeguard democratic societies and governance systems. Disinformation, propagated through digital platforms, threatens democratic processes and public discourse. Meanwhile, climate change exacerbates societal upheaval and migration patterns, posing complex security implications. The paper emphasizes the imperative of integrating environmental considerations into conflict resolution strategies and leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to counter disinformation effectively. By elucidating the multifaceted nature of these threats, the paper underscores the importance of collective action to address climate-related security challenges and preserve international stability. Ultimately, it calls for comprehensive strategies that promote media literacy, enhance digital resilience, and foster inclusive dialogue to mitigate the adverse effects of disinformation and climate change migration.*

Keywords: *diplomacy; balance of power; disinformation; climate change; resilience.*

Introduction

Times are changing and at a fast pace; humanity is encountering complex challenges, security crises which require high-level international collaboration and shared resources in order to be deterred or countered. Climate change is impacting humanity on many levels, because it not only triggers unpredictable disasters, but also weather abnormalities like prolonged drought, dangerous rise of sea levels, abnormal temperatures, which continuously impact millions of people worldwide. NATO and EU have taken climate change into consideration as a very serious matter, but at international level, there are other forces at play, which consider that having hegemonic supremacy is more important than the climate security of the planet. The People Republic of China, the Russian Federation and India (Hameleers et al., 2023; Espaliú-Berdud, 2023; Vasist et al., 2023; Sukumar et al., 2021; Mankekar, 2021; Imran et al., 2021; Arias-Zapata, 2022)(Hameleers et al., 2023; Espaliú-Berdud, 2023; Vasist et al., 2023; Sukumar et al., 2021; Mankekar, 2021; Imran et al., 2021; Arias-Zapata, 2022), are among the nations with the biggest demography and pollution (Yarlagadda et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Pallagiano, 2018; Pinho-Gomes et al., 2023)(Yarlagadda et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Pallagiano, 2018; Pinho-Gomes et al., 2023) impact on the planet but also which have

employed sophisticated tools like disinformation campaigns in order to influence opinions and mentalities of European and American citizens against climate change countermeasures, seeding lack of trust in NATO and EU amongst member states' citizens.

In this paper we shall focus on the European citizens' security when faced with climate changes, and the disinformation campaigns surrounding this issue and how the EU officials approach the problem. Our paper represents a consolidated review of documents from sources such as the European Union, NATO, the United Nations, as well as some relevant academic studies.

Our hypothesis is that, using the modern means, including artificial intelligence (AI), the European Union can ensure a secure environment for its citizens by building resilience to climate change disinformation and educational hubs in order to nourish constructive and ecological behaviors (Montoro-Montaroso et al., 2023; Schreiber et al., 2021; Yankoski et al., 2021; Lange et al., 2021; Karinshak et al., 2023; Mazurczyk et al., 2023; Kertysova, 2018).

The question that this hypothesis triggers is: does the European Union has what is necessary for ensuring its citizens security, when faced with the ongoing threats in the international arena? (Hameleers, 2023a; Caramancion et al., 2022)

This paper's purpose is to see how the EU navigates through the new glitches of the international system in order to respect all the United Nations 2030 Agenda in regards to climate change and the human security of its citizens with respect to climate change disinformation (Braumoeller, 2008).

The rapid pace of global change underscores the contemporary volatility within the International System, echoing the tumultuous post-World War II era. As conflicts escalate in countries and regions such as Ukraine and the Arab Peninsula and tensions simmer over Taiwan's sovereignty in the South China Sea, the global community faces multifaceted challenges at the onset of 2024. Among these, EU and NATO member states confront two pressing security threats: the proliferation of disinformation campaigns and the complex dynamics of climate change migration (Erlich et al., 2023; Hameleers, 2023b; Hameleers et al., 2023; Hassan, 2023; Humprecht, 2023; Sádaba et al., 2023; Edwards, 2021; Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2022).

Disinformation, disseminated through digital platforms and social media channels (Aïmeur et al., 2023; Simion, 2023; Petratos et al., 2023; Noguera-Vivo et al., 2023; Saurwein et al., 2020; Weikmann et al., 2023; Hameleers et al., 2020; Krafft et al., 2020; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2023), poses a significant threat to the integrity of democratic processes and public discourse impact (Espaliú-Berdud, 2023; Vasist et al., 2023; Hameleers, 2023b; Hameleers et al., 2023; Hassan, 2023; Humprecht, 2023; Sádaba et al., 2023; Saurwein et al., 2020; Edwards, 2021; Lanoszka, 2019; Freelon et al., 2020; Erlich et al., 2023; Duarte et al., 2023) within the EU and NATO regions. Recognizing its transnational nature, collaborative efforts are being prioritized to counter disinformation and fortify resilience against manipulation attempts.

Concurrently, the adverse impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events and disruptions to ecosystems, amplify the risks associated with migration patterns (Arenilla et al., 2020; Balsari et al., 2020; Elander et al., 2022; Kelman et al., 2019; Issifu et al., 2022; Twinomuhangi et al., 2023; Issa et al., 2023; Tabe, 2019; Burrows et al., 2016; Estok, 2023).

At the European Union level, over recent years, several important initiatives to tackle disinformation have been developed and implemented (such as the European Democracy Action Plan, the European Digital Media Observatory, the Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation, the Digital Services Act or the Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training). These initiatives involved actions directed at the EU member states, EU institutions, online platforms, news media, and EU citizens.

This article examines the intertwined security implications of disinformation and climate change migration within the European Union and NATO member states. By elucidating the

multifaceted nature of these threats and their implications for international stability, it seeks to underscore the imperative for proactive and coordinated responses to safeguard the integrity and resilience of democratic societies and governance systems.

1. Diplomatic and political actions in relation to climate change disinformation

The fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe sped up a process that began in the 70's of the twentieth century, namely, the modern implementation of human security in Europe. By acceding to NATO and the EU, most of the Eastern Europe states managed to ensure a level of security that individuals never had before (Kolodziej, 2005). However, disinformation campaigns pose a significant threat to public discourse regarding climate change by spreading false or misleading information that undermine scientific consensus and confuses the public about the severity and urgency of the issue (Bârgăoanu et al., 2023; Krekó, 2020). Such campaigns often promote climate change denial or downplay the risks associated with it, leading to a lack of awareness and action among citizens. This can hinder efforts to address climate change effectively, delaying or preventing the implementation of necessary policies and actions. Furthermore, disinformation campaigns targeting climate change can impact the security of citizens in EU and NATO countries in several ways. Firstly, by fostering doubt and confusion about the reality of climate change, these campaigns can impede efforts to mitigate its adverse effects, such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and disruptions to food and water supplies (Elliott, 2021; 2023). This can leave communities vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, including property damage, displacement, and even loss of life (Arenilla et al., 2020; Balsari et al., 2020). Secondly, disinformation campaigns may exacerbate social and political tensions within and between countries, hindering international cooperation on climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts (Espaliú-Berdud, 2023). By sowing division and distrust, these campaigns can undermine collective action and impede the development of effective policies and strategies to address climate-related security threats (Vasist et al., 2023; Caramancion et al., 2022). Moreover, the spread of climate change disinformation can also have economic implications, affecting industries and markets that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. For example, false information about the viability of renewable energy sources or the costs of transitioning to a low-carbon economy may discourage investment in clean energy technologies and delay the transition away from fossil fuels (Paine et al., 2023).

The discourse surrounding the concept of human security has been the subject of scholarly deliberation since the onset of the latter half of the twentieth century, with its initial introduction occurring notably within the context of the Helsinki Commission's renowned deliberations, wherein it was delineated as one of the four foundational pillars of democracy. Among the myriad interpretations put forth, the most salient definition posits human security as an approach wherein states and international organizations endeavor to employ a judicious blend of military and diplomatic strategies aimed at optimizing the efficacy of safeguarding national interests (CSCE, 2023). Out of the studied definitions, we consider that the most proper is that international organizations seek to take the best measures that combine the military and diplomatic practice in order to maximize the efficiency of defending the national interest (Buzan et al., 2009). Human security discourse, since its emergence, in the latter portion of the twentieth century, has been marked by profound debate, particularly regarding its relevance within the contemporary global landscape. Initially broached within the esteemed deliberations of the Helsinki Commission, it has evolved into a pivotal framework, intertwined with manifold geopolitical considerations. Such an approach is undertaken with the overarching goal of optimizing the efficacy of safeguarding national interests. Notably, within this paradigm, the proliferation of disinformation emerges as an acute threat, particularly in its capacity to obfuscate the realities of climate change, thereby undermining collective efforts towards sustainable environmental

stewardship (Waleij, 2023; Burrows et al., 2016; Balsari et al., 2020). This approach aims to bolster the efficacy of safeguarding national interests amidst a complex global landscape. However, due to contemporary challenges, such as the proliferation of disinformation, the imperative for effective countermeasures has become increasingly pronounced (Caramancion et al., 2022). In this context, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies emerges as a pivotal strategy (Karinshak et al., 2023; Schreiber et al., 2021; Yankoski et al., 2021). AI-driven tools offer the potential to analyze vast troves of data, identify patterns indicative of disinformation campaigns, and mitigate their impact on public perception and policy discourse (Kertysova, 2018).

The security paradigm traditionally aligns with the realist conceptual framework, wherein the focal point of security considerations is the state itself. Consequently, the establishment of a secure environment is contingent upon maintaining a delicate balance of power among international actors. This equilibrium is perceived as a deterrent for states seeking hegemonic dominance over the international system, particularly for those endowed with substantial strength. The rationale behind this perspective posits that states, once they have effectively secured their stability and safety, are disinclined to pursue hegemonic power. This is rooted in the understanding that the primary objective of states is to optimize their security rather than pursue an overtly dominant position in the international arena (Waltz, 1979).

In accordance with the discourse advanced by the Diplomatic Network, conflict resolution is defined as *"the systematic endeavor to address and resolve disputes or discordant interactions among involved parties"* (Sperandei, 2006; Trager, 2010). This process encompasses a spectrum of methodologies, notably including mediation, arbitration, negotiation, and litigation (Diplomacy School, 2023). In addition to these established diplomatic mechanisms, supplementary endeavors encompassing economic and military measures are often deployed in pursuit of conflict resolution objectives. Moreover, in the contemporary global context, the exacerbation of conflicts due to climate change impacts necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates environmental considerations into conflict resolution strategies. Thus, efforts to address climate-related disputes further underscore the multifaceted nature of contemporary conflict resolution paradigms (Paine et al., 2023; Gervais, 2022; Asmelash, 2023; Levine, 2018; Bizikova, 2022).

According to the Diplomatic Network, conflict resolution is *"the process of resolving disputes or disagreements between parties"* (Diplomacy School, 2023), all that being possible through various methods, amongst which mediation, arbitration, negotiation and litigation (Diplomacy School, 2023). To these four diplomatic efforts we can add economic and military measures (Diplomacy School, 2023).

Human security is represented by protecting fundamental freedoms, which are considered the essence of life. The United Nations defines human security in Resolution 66/290 of the General Assembly as *"an approach that supports Member States in identifying and addressing large-scale and cross-cutting challenges to ensure the survival, livelihoods, and dignity of their people"* (UN, 2012).

Since we have mentioned diplomacy as a tool of conflict resolution, we should provide a proper definition. Thus, diplomacy is defined as *"the behavior and relationship between states or other entities on the stage of world politics, by specialized personnel, and by peaceful means"* (Bull, 1977).

Deterrence theory constitutes a cornerstone of strategic discourse, offering insights into the dynamics of international relations and the prevention of conflict escalation. Central to this framework is the recognition of threats and their strategic goal, tailored to the specific context of the threat type or the application of force, with the overarching aim of dissuading adversaries from initiating hostilities or aggression against another sovereign entity (Gartzke et al., 2014). This strategic calculus encompasses a spectrum of deterrent measures, ranging from implicit to explicit forms of threat, including the strategic positioning of limited force.

Implicit within this paradigm is the notion of maintaining the status quo, wherein deterrence serves as a bulwark against the alteration of state actors' positions and the

preservation of prevailing geopolitical arrangements. Thus, deterrence emerges as a multifaceted strategy, underpinned by the judicious application of threats, aimed at fostering stability and deterring adversarial actions in the international arena (Morgan, 2003). Within the framework of countering disinformation, deterrence theory elucidates the strategic calculus underpinning the policies enacted by entities such as the EU and the United Nations (UN). These organizations are actively engaged in mitigating the proliferation of false or misleading information, recognizing its potential to undermine societal cohesion and international stability. In this context, deterrence encompasses the strategic deployment of measures aimed at dissuading actors from engaging in the dissemination of disinformation or perpetrating acts of information warfare targeting member states or global communities Saurwein et al., 2020; Edwards, 2021; Weikmann et al., 2023; Ozawa et al., 2023; Vasist et al., 2023; Espaliú-Berdud, 2023; Hameleers et al., 2020; 2022). Global communities, in the realm of geopolitics, refer to interconnected networks of nations, organizations, and individuals that operate on a global scale, transcending traditional boundaries and exerting influence across multiple regions. These communities are characterized by shared interests, values, and objectives, which often manifest in collaborative efforts to address common challenges and pursue mutual goals. The concept underscores the interdependence and interconnectedness of states and societies in an increasingly globalized world, where events and developments in one part of the world can have far-reaching implications for others (Huntington, 1996).

The EU and UN adopt a multifaceted approach to deterrence, encompassing a range of diplomatic, regulatory, and informational initiatives tailored to the specific nature of the disinformation threat. Diplomatically, they may impose sanctions or diplomatic repercussions on state or non-state actors found to be engaging in malicious disinformation campaigns (Lupovici, 2010; Hynek, 2010; Quackenbush, 2006). Regulatory measures may involve the implementation of legislation to counter disinformation and enhance transparency in digital platforms. Additionally, informational initiatives aim to empower citizens with critical thinking skills and promote media literacy to inoculate populations against the influence of disinformation (Lanoszka, 2019; Hameleers, 2023a).

Implicit within the EU and UN strategies is the commitment to upholding the integrity of information ecosystems, deterring adversarial actors from exploiting vulnerabilities, and preserving public trust in the reliability of information sources (Sádaba et al., 2023; Saurwein et al., 2020; Edwards, 2021). By adopting a proactive and collaborative approach to countering disinformation, these entities endeavour to safeguard societal resilience and uphold democratic values in the face of evolving threats to information integrity (Schreiber et al., 2021; Vasist et al., 2023; Krafft et al., 2020; Bastick, 2021).

2. How secure are the EU citizens when confronted with the ongoing climate changes and disinformation?

In adopting a comprehensive approach to this matter, subsequent to elucidating the key terminologies underpinning our inquiry, we shall commence by addressing the foremost concern therein: the safeguarding of the European Union (EU)'s citizenry.

2.1 NATO's strategy on combating climate change and disinformation

The formidable challenges posed by extreme weather conditions further underscore the complexities faced by military operations in rugged terrains. Given the diverse security challenges faced by European nations, ranging from geopolitical tensions to transnational threats, NATO serves as a cornerstone in fostering collective defense and ensuring the territorial

integrity of its member states. Particularly noteworthy is the evolving security landscape in Eastern Europe, where the specter of Russian aggression looms large following the events in Ukraine. In response to this destabilizing factor, NATO has embarked on a concerted effort to bolster its defensive posture along the Eastern flank, aiming to deter potential adversaries and safeguard the security interests of its allies.

The outbreak of Russian aggression in Ukraine marked a pivotal juncture in NATO's security calculus, prompting a reassessment of defense priorities and strategic imperatives. In light of the multifaceted nature of contemporary security challenges, NATO has undertaken robust measures to enhance its readiness and resilience in the face of potential threats emanating from the East. Central to this endeavor is the implementation of a comprehensive defense strategy aimed at creating a robust deterrent posture along NATO's Eastern frontier. This entails the deployment of military assets, the bolstering of defense infrastructure, and the strengthening of regional alliances and partnerships to ensure a unified and coordinated response to emerging security challenges.

In this dynamic security environment, characterized by evolving geopolitical dynamics and shifting threat landscapes, NATO's commitment to collective defense remains paramount. The Alliance's proactive stance in fortifying its Eastern flank underscores its unwavering dedication to upholding the principles of territorial integrity and collective security enshrined in its founding charter. As NATO continues to adapt to emerging security threats and challenges, its role as a bulwark against external aggression and a guarantor of stability in the Euro-Atlantic region remains indispensable. *“Climate breakdown and the loss of biodiversity stand as formidable forces reshaping our world, with implications extending into the realm of international security. These environmental challenges are not merely ecological concerns; they are potent structural forces that have the potential to profoundly impact the global security landscape”* (NATO, 2024).

Failing to adequately address climate change exacerbates the risk of widespread climatic breakdowns, as witnessed on a global scale in 2023, transcending geographical boundaries and impacting regions beyond Europe and North America. This phenomenon acts as a force multiplier, precipitating significant disruptions across vital societal and logistical networks and potentially catalyzing unrest and instability. Urgent attention and proactive measures are imperative to mitigate the cascading effects of climate change, not only on the European continent, but also on a global scale.

The correlation between climate change and societal upheaval is underscored by the concomitant rise in localized or national disturbances, such as riots and social unrest, alongside the proliferation of organized crime and patterns of migration towards colder regions. Evidentiary support for these claims is observable in the recent occurrences of farm and transporters' riots throughout the European Union, coinciding with escalating temperatures and unprecedented weather phenomena. These disturbances disrupt critical food supply chains, thereby precipitating economic instability and heightened vulnerability, particularly among marginalized social strata, with potential repercussions including food insecurity and mass displacement, thereby reshaping migration patterns and exerting pressure on regional economic and social equilibrium. The intricate relationship between climate change and societal upheaval within NATO countries is further underscored by the emergent phenomenon of localized or national disruptions, such as riots and social unrest, which have increasingly become a salient feature of contemporary socio-political landscapes. Of particular significance is the role of disinformation campaigns in catalyzing and exacerbating these disturbances, particularly evident during the 2022-2024 interval instances of truckers' and farmers' riots observed across the European Union.

Disinformation, characterized by the deliberate spread of false or misleading information, has emerged as a potent tool for manipulating public opinion, inciting discord, and fostering unrest within affected communities. In the context of the truckers' and farmers' riots,

disinformation campaigns have played a pivotal role in galvanizing support and mobilizing participants by disseminating misleading narratives and inflammatory rhetoric through various digital communication channels, including social media platforms and online forums.

These disinformation campaigns often exploit existing societal grievances and amplify perceptions of injustice or marginalization, thereby garnering sympathy and solidarity among segments of the population (Humprecht, 2023; Erlich et al., 2023; Pérez-Escobar et al., 2023). False narratives regarding government policies, economic hardships, or perceived threats to livelihoods serve to mobilize individuals and groups, driving them to participate in protests or acts of civil disobedience (Saurwein et al., 2020; Edwards, 2021; Schreiber et al., 2021; Yankoski et al., 2021; Ozawa et al., 2023; Hassan, 2023; Vasist et al., 2023; Krafft et al., 2020; Bastick, 2021; Soliman et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the proliferation of disinformation complicates efforts to address the root causes of societal unrest and undermines attempts at constructive dialogue and conflict resolution. By perpetuating divisive narratives and eroding trust in institutions, disinformation exacerbates social divisions and impedes the pursuit of effective solutions to underlying socio-economic challenges exacerbated by climate change (Soliman et al., 2023; Hameleers et al., 2020; 2022; 2023; Bârgăoanu et al., 2023).

In sum, the intersection of disinformation with climate-induced socio-economic disruptions underscores the need for comprehensive strategies aimed at combating disinformation, enhancing media literacy, and fostering inclusive dialogue within affected communities.

Addressing the root causes of societal unrest, including economic inequalities and environmental vulnerabilities, requires a concerted effort to counter disinformation and promote transparency, accountability, and social cohesion within NATO countries.

The intersection of disinformation campaigns with the protracted conflicts in the Middle East introduces a dimension of complexity to the evolving security landscape (Bennett, 2020; Shah et al., 2018; Watson, 2002; Steiner et al., 1993). As various actors vie for influence and leverage within the region, the dissemination of false narratives and propaganda becomes a potent tool in shaping public perception and advancing strategic agendas. Disinformation campaigns, often orchestrated by state and non-state actors alike, seek to manipulate information channels and sow discord among populations, exacerbating existing tensions and hindering efforts towards conflict resolution. These campaigns exploit vulnerabilities in digital communication platforms and social media networks, amplifying the spread of misinformation and fueling societal divisions (2019; Do Nascimento et al., 2022; Cohen et al., 2019).

Within this context, the rise of disinformation poses significant challenges for regional stability and security (Bârgăoanu et al., 2023). By fostering distrust and exacerbating sectarian and ethnic divisions, disinformation campaigns exacerbate societal tensions and undermine prospects for peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, the weaponization of information in the context of ongoing conflicts serves to perpetuate cycles of violence and perpetuate grievances, maintaining a cycle of instability and insecurity. In response, efforts to counter disinformation must be integrated into broader strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, encompassing measures to promote media literacy, enhance digital resilience, and foster dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting parties. Ultimately, addressing the root causes of disinformation and promoting transparency and accountability in information dissemination are essential to fostering conditions conducive to lasting peace and stability in the Middle East (Watson, 2002).

2.2 EU measures to counter climate change and disinformation

In report to climate change challenges, the European Union has some strong goals to reach by 2050 (European Commission 2023), namely:

- a. A climate-neutral EU by 2050;
- b. A reduction up to 55% of emissions by 2030;

- c. A clear EU law on climate change;
- d. Financing the EU's climate transition.

Since the end of 2019, its leaders agreed that the EU should reach climate neutrality by 2050, meaning by that time, it can emit into the atmosphere the greenhouse gas that can be absorbed naturally by nature. This implied a drastic change in several important if not critical industries, such as that of oil and gas industry, and by extension, to those companies that use and manufacture various products out of them.

In an issue as important as the EU's security we have to mention the Common Defense and Security Policy, and its role in joining hands with the Climate Change and Defense Roadmap (CCDR). The CCDR identifies states that the defense sector has to contribute to the fulfilling of the European Green Deal's goals, that can identify measures in the short term (2020-2021), medium term (2022-2024), yet the long term has still to be determined 2025-beyond (Waleij, 2023).

The roadmap is composed out of three distinct entwined areas such as:

1. The operational dimension
2. Capability development
3. Strengthening multilateralism and partnership.

The roadmap of measures also includes the deployment of an environmental advisor as a standard position in CSDP missions and ops with the role to implement successfully of Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) in their missions. Another goal is to initiate the development of measurement capabilities and reporting the environmental footprint on water, energy, etc. within the CSDP missions and operations (EEAS, 2022).

In the EU's Climate Change and Defense Roadmap from March 2022, it is stated that *“climate change increases global instability. This will likely increase the number of crisis situations to which the EU might need to respond while at the same time the armed forces will be asked more frequently to assist civilian authorities in response to flooding or forest fires, both at home and abroad. Another important point on the Roadmap is that that “the future capabilities will need to adapt to this changing operational environment (...) the armed forces need to invest in greener technologies throughout their capability inventory and infrastructure”* (EEAS, 2022).

The role of the roadmap is that to make sure that climate policy implications become an important component of the EU's thinking and action on issues such as defense research and development, industry and technology, infrastructure, as well as the EU's CSDP (EEAS, 2022).

In response to the mounting apprehensions regarding the proliferation of disinformation and external interference in democratic processes the EU has embarked on a multifaceted strategy aimed at safeguarding the integrity of its information environment. A prominent initiative in this endeavor is the Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation, introduced in 2022, signifying the EU's commitment to fostering collaboration among online platforms, civil society actors, and pertinent stakeholders to counteract the dissemination of false information (European Commission, 2022). Simultaneously, initiatives like the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), established in 2020, have been instrumental in enhancing transparency and accountability in the digital media landscape (European Digital Media Observatory, 2020). Through collaborative efforts, the EU seeks to bolster its resilience against the propagation of harmful content and mitigate the destabilizing impact of disinformation on its democratic institutions.

Legislative measures serve as a cornerstone of the EU's strategy to address the challenges posed by disinformation and uphold the integrity of its digital ecosystem. Notably, the Digital Services Act (DSA), which came into effect in 2023, with a compliance deadline set for February 17, 2024, represents a significant regulatory milestone aimed at imposing stringent obligations on digital service providers (European Parliament, 2024). By stipulating requirements for transparency, content moderation, and cooperation with authorities, the DSA aims to curtail the dissemination of illicit content, including disinformation, thereby fortifying resilience against nefarious interference in the online sphere. In conjunction with these efforts,

the Revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), enacted in 2020, reinforces regulatory measures governing audiovisual media platforms, ensuring adherence to standards of accuracy, impartiality, and transparency (European Parliament and Council, 2018).

In March 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on foreign interference, reaffirming its commitment to countering external threats to the EU's democratic processes and information space (European Parliament, 2022). This resolution underscores the EU's proactive stance in addressing the evolving challenges posed by adversarial entities seeking to undermine democratic institutions and sow discord. Simultaneously, the establishment of the Parliament's new special Committee on Foreign Interference (INGE2) underscores the EU's dedication to fostering cross-border cooperation, sharing information, and bolstering resilience-building measures (European Parliament, 2022). Through these initiatives, the EU aims to safeguard its democratic principles and uphold the integrity of its information ecosystems in the face of evolving threats.

In conclusion, the EU's comprehensive strategy to counter disinformation encompasses legislative measures, institutional frameworks, and collaborative endeavors aimed at reinforcing resilience against false information and external interference. By fostering cooperation among stakeholders, enhancing regulatory oversight, and promoting transparency and accountability in the digital domain, the EU endeavors to maintain the trust of its citizens and preserve the integrity of its democratic processes in the digital age. As the threat landscape evolves, sustained efforts to strengthen cooperation, bolster regulatory frameworks, and enhance resilience will remain imperative in safeguarding the EU's democratic values and countering the destabilizing effects of disinformation.

2.3 The CEE Region versus climate change and disinformation

The urgency to confront proliferation of disinformation in Romania and other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is underscored by a combination of factors, including the escalating impact of climate change and the pervasive influence of disinformation campaigns. According to the European Commission, these nations have witnessed a surge in online disinformation, particularly anti-EU narratives, alongside vulnerabilities stemming from fragile media systems and the emergence of alternative online information ecosystems, notably through social media platforms (European Commission, 2022). Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon, encompassing both local and regional dynamics, and necessitates strengthened national and regional collaboration to bolster resilience against disinformation and misinformation, especially in the context of climate change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the dissemination of disinformation and fake news across the CEE region, amplifying the urgency of addressing this issue. Romanian and foreign actors have increasingly exploited disinformation campaigns to advance strategic and political objectives, while the region's historical context, situated between the Soviet Union and the Western world, has fostered susceptibility to manipulation (Krekó, 2020). Additionally, the region's totalitarian past has not conferred immunity to disinformation but has instead heightened receptivity to deception from various sources. As a result, the CEE countries, as relatively young and fragile democracies, face heightened vulnerability to disinformation campaigns. Following the work of Buturoiu et al. (2021), the CEE countries emerge as particularly vulnerable to the insidious effects of disinformation campaigns, compounded by the challenges posed by climate change. As relatively young and fragile democracies, these nations grapple with a unique set of socio-political dynamics that render them susceptible to manipulation and exploitation by external actors seeking to sow discord and undermine democratic institutions. The transition from authoritarian rule to democracy in the CEE countries has been marked by significant social and economic upheaval, leaving behind legacies of mistrust, political polarization, and institutional fragility. This legacy provides fertile

ground for the spread of disinformation, as societal divisions and grievances are exploited to advance political agendas and undermine public trust in democratic processes. Moreover, the limited experience with democratic governance and the weak institutional frameworks in these countries make them ill-prepared to effectively combat the sophisticated disinformation tactics employed by state and non-state actors. Climate change exacerbates these vulnerabilities by amplifying existing socio-economic challenges and creating new avenues for exploitation. The CEE countries, with their heavy reliance on carbon-intensive industries and vulnerability to extreme weather events, face disproportionate impacts from climate change. These impacts, including disruptions to food and water supplies, increased frequency of natural disasters, and economic instability, provide fertile ground for disinformation campaigns that seek to exploit public fears and uncertainties. Furthermore, the interconnectedness of climate change and security issues exacerbates the vulnerability of CEE countries to disinformation. As climate-related security threats, such as resource scarcity, environmental migration, and geopolitical tensions over water and land resources, become more pronounced, external actors may exploit these vulnerabilities to foment unrest and advance their own strategic interests. In response to these challenges, CEE countries must prioritize efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, promote media literacy, and enhance resilience to disinformation. This requires robust coordination at the national and regional levels, as well as collaboration with international partners and organizations. Additionally, addressing the underlying socio-economic drivers of vulnerability, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to information, is crucial to mitigating the impact of disinformation campaigns and building more resilient democracies in the CEE. The CEE region has become a battleground for competing narratives perpetuated by state, non-state, commercial, and political actors, aiming to undermine democratic transformations and European integration efforts, all amid the backdrop of climate change (Krekó, 2020). Disinformation campaigns (Wang et al., 2022) have fueled social polarization, exacerbated distrust in mainstream media, and perpetuated unresolved public controversies. Moreover, narratives exploiting ambivalence towards Western values, such as portraying the EU as weak and indifferent, have intensified anti-EU sentiments, complicating efforts to address climate change and its associated challenges (Bârgăoanu et al., 2023).

Disinformation in the CEE region exploits pre-existing structural weaknesses, including low trust in public authorities, institutions, and politicians, compounded by governance deficiencies and elite quality (Bârgăoanu et al., 2023). These trust deficits, coupled with ongoing conflicts and geopolitical tensions, have further heightened vulnerability to disinformation, particularly in the context of climate change. Moreover, shifts in media consumption patterns, with traditional media experiencing declining trust levels and online platforms emerging as primary sources of news and information, have exacerbated the spread of misinformation (Waleij, 2023). Climate change-related disinformation further complicates the narrative landscape, as seen in the proliferation of conspiracy theories and the amplification of pro-Russian sentiments (Corbu et al., 2022).

In light of these challenges, comprehensive strategies are needed to counter disinformation and promote media literacy, particularly in the context of climate change. Strengthened collaboration at national and regional levels, combined with enhanced regulatory frameworks and efforts to build public resilience, are essential to mitigate the disruptive effects of disinformation and misinformation on climate change discourse and response efforts.

Despite the significance of media consumption in influencing attitudes, a substantial portion of respondents in Hungary (33%), Romania (28%), and Bulgaria (30%) struggle to discern fake news, as noted by the European Commission (European Commission, 2021). According to Bârgăoanu et al. (2023), rapid proliferation of technologies, coupled with the global surge in internet usage and the presence of weak media and information ecosystems, underscores the criticality of equipping citizens with the skills to engage with, comprehend, and critically evaluate various forms of media. Notably, amidst the vast volume of deceptive information, a discernible pattern emerges

wherein polluted narratives circulate transnationally or even globally. Often disseminated through private instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook, these hyper-personalized contents operate stealthily beneath the radar, evading public scrutiny and content curation, before infiltrating more public or mainstream outlets such as Facebook public pages, newsfeeds, blogs, online platforms, and even traditional media outlets (Bârgăoanu et al., 2023).

Given this context, there is an urgent imperative to investigate and address more the phenomenon, accounting for local and regional nuances through a comprehensive societal approach. Our proposal advocates for a holistic strategy involving diverse stakeholders collaborating to combat the dissemination and repercussions of false information. Recognizing that disinformation transcends mere technological challenges, it is imperative to acknowledge its multifaceted impact across society.

Because one way of tackling the complex problem of climate change mitigation is by doing more towards poverty eradication (Zhang et al., 2022; Kalair et al., 2021; Pallagiano, 2018) (Zhang et al., 2022; Kalair et al., 2021; Pallagiano, 2018), cheap fossil fuel energy represents a double-edged sword (Kalair et al., 2021) (Kalair et al., 2021). On the one hand, access to affordable green energy is essential for promoting economic growth, improving living standards, and lifting populations out of poverty. But green energy innovation is not possible without costly research and due time (Zhang et al., 2022) (Zhang et al., 2022). Cheap energy sources, such as fossil fuels, have historically played a central role in driving industrialization and economic development, particularly in regions with limited access to renewable energy alternatives. However, the reliance on cheap fossil fuels comes at a significant cost to the environment and public health (Pallagiano, 2018) (Pallagiano, 2018). The burning of fossil fuels releases greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming, air pollution, and environmental degradation. As climate change intensifies, vulnerable communities in Romania and CEE countries are disproportionately impacted by extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and food insecurity, exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities and perpetuating cycles of poverty (Pinho-Gomes et al., 2023) (Pinho-Gomes et al., 2023). Navigating the trade-offs between cheap energy, poverty eradication, and climate change mitigation requires a nuanced approach that balances short-term economic benefits with long-term sustainability goals. While cheap energy may provide immediate relief for impoverished communities, it also perpetuates a reliance on environmentally harmful practices that undermine the resilience of ecosystems and exacerbate climate-related vulnerabilities. Investing in clean energy alternatives offers a promising pathway for reconciling the trade-offs between poverty eradication and climate change mitigation (Zhang et al., 2022) (Zhang et al., 2022). Renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, provide affordable and sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels, offering the potential to promote economic development while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation.

Conclusions

Within NATO, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the linkages between climate change, disinformation campaigns, security and geopolitical stability, with respect to the High North region. As such, the organization has been increasingly integrating climate considerations into its security planning and operations. NATO member states have committed to reducing their carbon footprint and enhancing their resilience to climate-related risks. Furthermore, NATO has been exploring opportunities for collaboration with partner countries and international organizations to leverage expertise and resources in addressing climate-related security challenges.

Similarly, the European Union has been at the forefront of global efforts to combat climate change and disinformation. The EU's Green Deal initiative outlines a comprehensive roadmap for achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and transitioning to a sustainable, circular economy. As part of this initiative, the EU has set ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse

gas emissions, increasing renewable energy capacity, and promoting energy efficiency. Additionally, the EU has allocated significant funding towards research and innovation in clean energy technologies and has established mechanisms to support member states in their transition towards a greener economy. This includes initiatives to incentivize investment in renewable energy infrastructure, promote energy efficiency measures, and support the development of clean transportation systems. By prioritizing green energy solutions, NATO and the EU aim to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels, mitigate environmental degradation, and enhance energy security. Moreover, NATO and the EU are leveraging their collective resources and expertise to drive innovation in clean energy technologies and services. Through collaborative research and development initiatives, these organizations are fostering the creation of cutting-edge solutions for sustainable energy production, storage, and distribution. By harnessing the potential of emerging technologies such as renewable energy, energy storage, and smart grids, NATO and the EU seek to accelerate the transition towards a low-carbon economy and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come.

Addressing the proliferation of disinformation in Romania and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries intersects with the complex trade-offs associated with achieving sustainable development goals, particularly in the context of poverty alleviation and climate change mitigation.

NATO and the EU are demonstrating a shared commitment to addressing the challenges of climate change and environmental sustainability. Through strategic planning, policy development, and collaborative initiatives, these organizations are actively promoting the adoption of green energy solutions and advancing the transition towards a more sustainable future. By working together towards common goals, NATO and the EU can effectively mitigate the impacts of climate change disinformation campaigns, enhance energy security, and promote environmental resilience across the globe. Examples of such disinformation campaigns include spreading false information about the causes of climate change, downplaying its severity, or exaggerating its effects for political gain. These campaigns aim to undermine public trust in climate science and hinder efforts to implement effective environmental policies.

Consequently, fostering national, regional and international synergies becomes essential to enhancing comprehension of the analyzed challenges and nurturing cooperation to counter them. Such a multifaceted approach is indispensable, considering that disinformation poses complex challenges that intersect with various societal sectors. By engaging all stakeholders, it becomes feasible to formulate comprehensive and pragmatic strategies aimed at mitigating the propagation and impact of false information related to climate change.

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THE CURRENT INTERDEPENDENCE OF SECURITY SECTORS ON INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

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Abstract: *The content of this article outlines a different and complete picture of how the security sectors (political, military, economic, societal and environmental) interact today. Therefore, using contextual analysis as a research method, it will aim to generate detailed answers to the following research question: How the growing dynamics of the international relations, the multidimensionality confrontation environments of actors and the rise of high-tech affect the interdependence between security sectors?*

Thus, I will determine the causality between the three factors and the interdependence of the security sectors through an analysis of recent security issues from different security complexes. Therefore, the aim of the article is to highlight the steady increase of reciprocity within the security sectors of the respective actor on the international stage, but also within the security complexes in which it is embedded. It will show that a security problem, regardless of the sector in which it is triggered, often overflows the other sectors and even to other actors. Today, states are so dependent on each other that often the analysis itself and the resolution of the security problems cannot be done independently. However, the threshold of acceptance and the level at which a common security problem is felt differs from one state to another, depending on specific factors that will be detailed in the article.

Keywords: *interdependence; security sectors; security problem; international relations; multidimensionality of confrontational environments; high-tech.*

Introduction

The vision of the Copenhagen School remains the most appropriate one to frame the events taking place today in terms of security. As Barry Buzan argues in his paper *Security - A New Framework for Analysis*, the traditional approach is not useful or appropriate anymore and gives way to a comprehensive one that considers the interaction of all security sectors (political, military, economic, societal and environmental) when a security problem arises. This article comes to complete this view, firstly by presenting and demonstrating the three factors reminded in the research questions (*the growing dynamics of international relations, the multidimensionality confrontation environments of actors and the rise of high-tech*) as influencing the process of interaction of the security sectors and, secondly, by supporting the recently emerging concept of complementing the actors' environments of confrontation with relatively new ones (the cyber/digital environment and the cognitive environment).

The study carried out in this regard is qualitative and will support future scientific research by providing new arguments on the imperative of continuing to use a comprehensive approach to any security issue. A first step is to maintain this thinking, based on causal

reasoning, in security analysis by directing the focus on the questions *How? Why? When?* These questions will then highlight, in the depth of the analysis, the interaction between security sectors in the context of the current hybrid manifestations of the main international actors.

Thus, security remains one of the most contested topics on the agenda of meetings of state and non-state leaders in international relations and, “security is the process that takes politics beyond the rules of the game and the framework of the problem” (Buzan, de Wilde, Waever 2010, 44). Therefore, international actors are forced to reorder their agenda and re-prioritize the topics they address when a security issue arises. A public issue can be on the non-politicized, politicized or securitized spectrum. Its placement in one of the three situations is generated by several factors, but mainly by the interference of state values and interests within a geopolitical context. For a public issue to be considered a security issue it must involve three characteristics: it must pose an existential threat, it must require emergency action, and it must produce negative effects within inter-unit relations if left unresolved (Buzan, de Wilde, le Waever 2010, 48).

A security problem may be generated within one area of interest but at the same time it may involve or affect others. These areas have been defined by some experts as the five security sectors: political, military, economic, societal and environmental. Nowadays they are closely interlinked if we refer to almost any newly emerging security issue. Their interdependence has been noted since ancient times and used in various ways to tip the balance of power in favor of the one with the vision to do so. Subsequently, various theories have developed, including the need to pivot from the traditional approach to security (involving only the military and political sectors) to a comprehensive approach, encompassing all security sectors.

A century of extreme changes, exposed to threats in various fields “the 21st century is a century of interdependencies” (Frunzeti 2009, 5). This generalized interdependence is high due to the fact that most states are component parts of more security complexes than in the past (alliances, coalitions, international governmental and non-governmental organizations but also ideologies/currents/socio-political movements with a cross-border character, etc.). In these security complexes, the dynamics of actions are determined by the international relations between actors, the environments in which they take place, and also by the fulminant rise of new technologies, a facilitating factor due to some consequences such as: speed of data processing, reduced consumption of resources, timeliness of information, “an unprecedented compression of space and time” (Frunzeti 2009, 5); in the virtual environment, actors can meet, debate and take decisions in record time without having to travel, etc.

1. The concept of contemporary security and the interdependence of security sectors

The definition of the concept of security generally depends on the perspective from which it is approached. However, contemporary security can no longer be viewed from a single angle, but requires a holistic approach, analyzing all possible effects across security sectors and considering all possible combinations and scenarios. This is necessary in the situation of the increasing use of hybrid warfare tactics, for example in the conflict of Ukraine: “a mixture of military and non-military means of aggression, with deception, through overt and covert actions” (Buşe 2014, 10). At the same time, the reality in which we live presents itself as a requirement in this regard: contradictory events, clear lack of demarcation between war and peace, the possibility of fighting a war in peacetime without falling under international legal jurisdiction (cyber, cognitive, psychological warfare - known for actions in the grey area) due to gaps in this area, economic blackmail, etc.

Interdependence within a security complex can also be deduced from the following definition by Professor Barry Buzan: “International security is determined fundamentally by the internal and external security of different social systems, by the extent to which, in general,

the identity of the system depends on external circumstances. Experts generally define societal security as internal security" (Buzan, de Wilde, Waever 2010, 28). Relating to the present day, even if the definition narrows the phrase security issue to the social sector in the largest part, it remains one of the main targets of new tactics specific to hybrid, psychological, cognitive warfare. However, the phenomenon is much more complex as security must be seen as a microsystem subject to a wide range of factors that can shape it. Therefore "following the rule of any system, it is characterized by stability or instability, a state given by the absence/presence of risk factors as a whole" (Iftode 2011, 56). These risk factors are mirrored by the wide range of vulnerabilities, risks and threats specific to each state. A good anticipatory knowledge of them and a real prediction of their possible effects on the security sectors will lead to the development of real and reliable strategies.

Focusing on what is subject of interest to the state, it can be seen that in general there are different approaches to the same security issues on international level. Thus, distinct conceptions are characteristic of strictly national identity-specific elements. "In the view of some currents in international relations theory, the concept of security in general and security policy in particular contain at their core elements of definition that are related to moral, ethical or religious values. The problem is that these are not represented and perceived in the same way in the world today. They give local or regional color to security policies but, more than that, they make the difference between the strategies promoted by different states and nations" (Buşe, 2014, 276). Therefore, it can also be seen on the basis of this theory that an international security issue can affect states and the interaction of security sectors differently (for example, hypothetically speaking, a law on limiting the access of migrants to the European Union (EU) space will affect the security of the states, from a military/police point of view, through which this space is penetrated, more than the security of the states that are transited. Similarly, from an economic point of view, the states that will become long-term hosts for migrants will be more affected than the states through which they merely transit).

The way in which security is affected by various factors is also noted by other authors: "At the global level, the security environment is undergoing a continuous transformation, reflecting: interdependencies and unpredictability in the system of international relations; the difficulty of delimiting classical risks and threats from asymmetric and hybrid ones" (Repez, Deaconu 2016, 10). In the above quotation, two of the three factors analyzed in this article stand out, namely: the growing dynamics of international relations and the multidimensionality of the environments in which actors confront each other.

2. Highlighting factors leading to the interdependence of security sectors in the context of recently disputed international security issues

International security stability is an elusive goal when access to resources is unequal, the needs are different, influence in markets is disproportionate, and the way actors pursue their interests is one that combines hybrid tactics often designed in multiple confrontational environments to achieve their goals. Nowadays, these hybrid tactics are applied across all security sectors, in different combinations, depending on the context, with a propensity for the use of cyber and cognitive attacks. The latter are preferred, as with judicious planning and execution (within the politico-military sectors most of the time), but also timely exploitation of the context, they will produce impressive effects at low cost in the societal sector (influencing public opinion playing a key role in influencing subsequent political decisions), but also in the economic or environmental sector (sabotage, information leakage, etc.). Cyber and cognitive confrontational environments are thus becoming 'modern battlefields' in which, due to

legislative loopholes and the possibility of concealing the perpetrator anonymously, actions under these new confrontational environments are carried out even in a state of peace.

International relations are in a “dynamic equilibrium” (Buşe 2012, 47) that captures actors in a continuous and non-linear movement in their activity to pursue their interests on the international stage. This partial equilibrium is disturbed by a variety of phenomena such as: the reconfiguration of multi-polarity at the global level and the redistribution of power within the balance of power, for example the “spectacular rise of China in the economic-military sphere” (Marga 2021, 311), the redefinition of some borders and the resizing of spheres of influence, such as the case of the Crimean peninsula in the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine (Valica 2021), differentiated access to resources - a generally accepted source of instability (Iftode 2011, 57), etc.

In order to project interests in international relations, geopolitical rivalries often crystallize in which “[...] actors are in constant competition. They will use everything from persuasion to threats and coercion. The ability of an actor to impose itself or not in the dispute with other actors is given by its potential power/power resources, the place it occupies in the structure of international relations and the prestige it enjoys” (Buşe 2014, 55). The use by actors of all means to achieve their objectives implies, without a doubt, the unconditional interaction of all security sectors. Persuasion can be attributed to the political and social sectors describing actions to determine individuals to choose certain options against them, while for the other actions, threat and coercion, tools belonging to the economic and military sectors are often used.

The rapid rise of high-tech and the market competition that has emerged as a result are driving down procurement prices and facilitating wider access for actors to acquire armaments, equipment, military technology, new generation IT&C products, etc. This development implies another dangerous trend whereby states and non-state actors are acquiring and owning disproportionately to their real defense needs, the ability to project their own force or even the availability of their own resources in this segment. The military sector therefore inevitably influences the economic, social and political sectors. Imbalances are created within the organization by resources being re-planned and redistributed to the military sector or even by the economy being forced to produce in this direction. Certainly the societal sector is the first to be affected, and then the political sector, because at regional level, these changes alter the centers of power and reorganize the balance of power.

2.1 Russian Federation intervention in Ukraine. Cognitive attacks

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) currently recognizes five battlefields: land, air, sea, space and cyber. However, the application of certain hybrid tactics, which is also generating new approaches in the growing literature, is creating a sixth field: “the cognitive battlefield” (Mahajan 2023), thus highlighting the multidimensionality of the environments of confrontation presented. The actor can therefore project his force into the physical, the cyber and a new virtual environment, one that increasingly seeks to subjugate the will of the adversary and psychologically influence him to act in accordance with the adversary's interests and therefore contrary to the way he would consciously do so.

According to the definition of the great theorist Carl von Clausewitz, war: “[...] is an act of violence designed to compel our adversary to do our will”. We can say that the definition remains true today, the aim also being to hijack the will, but this goal can also be achieved by an indirect, conspiratorial act of violence, directed at the subconscious level, without visible traces at first sight. A cognitive attack can thus induce an action but also an inaction “to use an invisible hand, to control the opponent's will, making the opponent feel: I can't and I dare not, and then achieve the effect of: I don't want to” (Bernal, Carter, Singh, Cao, Madreperla 2020). Its most important feature is the possibility to carry out cognitive attacks in peacetime as well, due to the anonymity of this range of actions.

The Russian Federation has used and is still using classic tools of cognitive attacks, such as disinformation and propaganda, in the Ukraine conflict. The main security sector that has

been and is intended to be affected by these attacks, subscribed to the new combat environment, is the societal sector. The change in the perception and the will of the society will determine in turn an effect on the political and military sector, which will have to comply with or, less often, oppose the new visions/desires of society. In the following I will recount a set of actions in the sphere of cognitive attacks captured by Georgii Pochepstov, professor at Mariupol State University, during the war in Ukraine:

- “change in the language for describing the situation, borrowing from a sample of older negative situations;
- making up fake events and objects in order to keep the selected line of attack on the opponent;
- organizing different protest actions on the Ukrainian territory for Russian TV-news consumption;
- only one interpretation for an event could be seen on TV, drowning any dangerous counter-information that can appear;
- inviting biased journalists and experts;
- military actions are justified solely by noble, just motives; the enemy is portrayed as coming out of hell;
- anchoring bias – the interpretation that comes first is not so easy to change, and the Russian TV was the first to interpret the situation;
- selective perception – we see what we want to see: Russian journalists were looking for and giving negative view of the Ukrainian situation;
- availability heuristic – overestimation of the importance of information available: with all four Russian channels speaking from one governing centre, the viewers were thinking that they know the whole truth;
- bandwagon effect – groupthink doesn’t allow room for individual view, which contradicts the central view of the events;
- blind spot bias – we see mistakes only in others’ words and arguments: Russian journalist and viewers many times were saying that Ukrainian citizens are turned into zombies by their TV” (Pochepstov 2018).

Summarizing the above, it can be seen that cognitive attacks can be directed either at the adversary in order to shape its will to act in a certain way or not to act, or they can be directed at one's own social sector in order to legitimize executed and/or future actions, to discredit the adversary and to induce the feeling of the necessity to continue supporting the regime's actions.

Thus, in the case presented above, the multidimensionality of the confrontation environments influencing the interaction of the political, military and societal sectors can be observed, leading to the interdependence necessary for the continuation of the actions and tactics assumed. The breeding ground on which these false messages have been inseminated is rendered by several specific characteristics of the affected population in this area:

- in such a context people look more to the emotional zone and radical speeches (much simpler, easily constructed and with concrete and safe destinations to be absorbed) to confirm their emotions;
- some new events initially create information voids that are speculated and filled by manipulators of public opinion;
- the public has already become accustomed (as of 24 February 2022) to the new news model (delivery of false information in breaking news packaging, which induces the idea of topicality, timeliness, the need to consume it immediately) and as a consequence there is less and less readership of specialized articles from reliable sources, which of course do not have such an impact because of their form.

2.2 The conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Influencing the rise of hi-tech - economic effects on Germany

The conflict between the State of Israel and the Islamic terrorist organization, Hamas, affects different actors on the international scene to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their interests in this area and on international relations. Germany may be one of the countries that seems to have something to lose from this conflict. Israel is an important partner in the development of new technologies, according to Rolf Langhammer, senior researcher at the Institute for the World Economy (IWE) in Kiel, as quoted by DW television: “Trade and direct investment between the two countries is low, but for technology transfer and research cooperation in areas such as the natural and physical sciences, Israel is extremely important and has remained so since 1960 [...] Industry leaders expect the two countries' collaboration to remain strong, with Israel leading the way in areas such as cyber security, biotechnology, medicine and renewable energy. But in the short term, many projects could be put on hold as uncertainty continues to remain the order of the day in the region” (Langhammer 2023).

The interplay of the security, military, political and economic sectors is easily seen if we look further into the actions of the German government. A government representative has stated that the German state will give its full support to Israel and that it has a fundamental right to self-defense. Further, according to the same publication (Martin, 2023), Germany should position itself carefully in relation to this conflict, as it risks causing imbalances in the balance of power or even losing more important partners, with some countries condemning Israel's way of fighting against Hamas terrorists and also some of its military actions. Political scientist Marius Ghincea, a lecturer at Syracuse University USA, divided European states into three main categories: “What can international relations theory tell us about the positions of Western states on the events in Israel/Palestine? In the case of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, Western states have adopted three types of positions: (a) they have exclusively supported Israel (Germany, Great Britain); (b) they have adopted a nuanced position, balancing Israel's right to defend itself with calls for restraint (France, USA); (c) they have condemned Israel without necessarily defending Hamas/Palestinians (Spain, Ireland)” (Ghincea 2023).

Thus, in the case presented above, the intertwining of the two factors can be observed: the growing dynamics of international relations (highlighted by the strategy adopted by the German state to balance its own interests with the maintenance of international relations with other states) and the rise of high technologies (shaped by Germany's need to maintain its position in this segment with the help of its partner, the state of Israel), and their effects on the interdependence of the following security sectors: political, military, economic.

At the same time, Germany's position towards Israel is also outlined as an attempt to diminish its unpleasant past, regarding the anti-Semitic policy and genocides committed during the Holocaust by the Nazi government, as the German literature itself states “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” – the German term for dealing with the Nazi past (Frei 1996). This national shame and the way in which attempts are being made to diminish it also illustrate the interaction of the dynamics of international relations with the political and societal sector.

Conclusions

The direction, in which society is heading, in principle, as many authors have confirmed over the years, is without doubt the creation of a new world order, subscribed to the phenomenon of globalization. A system which wants to be perfect from all points of views (political, military, economic, societal and environmental), a 'better world' as it will be called at some point. This is one argument for why security interdependence is intended to be ever greater and is already visibly on the rise internationally. A new world order can only be created

within a strong security framework without the occurrence of remarkable incidents but also, the international order tends to undergo significant changes primarily in response to major events. In this context, the development of effective international relations, first at the inter-state level and then at the regional and global level, becomes not the goal but the motivation for creating real security interdependence.

International relations increasingly take on the form of a race against time in terms of pursuing interests, grabbing as many resources as possible and monopolizing markets. In this sense they appear linear and predictable on the surface, officially, but in essence, the individual good takes precedence over the collective good. As the American writer Alvin Toffler rightly said in his 1980s book *The Third Wave*, these things are being done much more quickly today and are being turned on their head in many ways, thanks to the ever-growing information society in which we live. Actors have been quick to link the concept of power with that of information domination and thus the new modern confrontational environment, the cyber/digital dimension, has crystallized. Further on, either various tactics already established (e.g. disinformation, propaganda used in combination by the political and military sector in the Ukrainian conflict) were adapted, mainly using digital social platforms of information at the expense of classical ones such as radio, television, or new ones were developed based on more subtle techniques of influencing, changing perception or dominating the will of the adversary (e.g. in cognitive warfare where the purpose of launching an information is more difficult to intuit).

The phenomenon of the rise of high technologies remains the reason why society has arrived in the information age. One of the key conditions for the emergence of this new environment of confrontation, which is successfully used in all security sectors (especially political, military and societal), is that it usually encompasses technologies that are accessible, do not require special resources and are readily available to most citizens (the best example is the smartphone). In this sense, the environment of confrontation encompasses both these physical components, but above all components that are not easily identifiable (e.g. the ether, cyberspace, the online environment, etc.). It is therefore impossible to really define this 'theatre of operations' in terms of time and space and also to identify the perpetrator and, consequently, to define the security sectors (an action to steal information which, on the face of it, is launched by the economic sector may have political or military implications if the information is of a strategic nature). The development of new technologies and the struggle for informational advantage are themselves interdependent in the view of the players (this is one of the reasons why Germany, for example, has from the outset sided with Israel, a key partner in the development of hi-tech).

Thus, as stated at the beginning of the article, the interaction of the security sectors is different depending on the context and the interests of each actor. By comparison, it can be seen that in the case of the conflict in Ukraine most NATO actors almost entirely sided with Kiev, but in the case of the Middle East conflict they take different positions primarily due to the dynamics of international relations and individual state interests, and even if most actors are part of the same security complex (EU, NATO) and share common values. At the same time, the interaction of the security sectors is inevitable and necessary today, and this process is certainly accentuated by the factors outlined and confirmed in the article (*the growing dynamics of international relations, the multidimensionality of the environments in which the players are confronted and the rise of high-tech*).

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FDI SCREENING AND ITS ROLE IN PREVENTING HYBRID THREATS. CASE STUDY – ROMANIA

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***Abstract:** Since 2019, the EU has stepped up the adoption of measures to protect the internal market and the economies of the member states from security and public order risks. Thus, Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for examining foreign direct investments (FDI) in the Union was adopted. Combating hybrid threats has become, in 2020, a strategic priority at EU level. This article analyzes the legal framework and the changes made in the context of the proposed revision of Regulation 2019/452, as part of the European Commission's initiative to improve the economic security of the Union. The article also presents a case study on the particular situation of the FDI examination mechanism applicable in Romania. The purpose of this study is to analyze the legislative provisions, the specific elements compared to the situation in other member states, the institutional framework and the decision-making flow.*

***Keywords:** hybrid threat; FDI screening mechanism; cooperation mechanism; strategy; institutional framework.*

Preliminary considerations

The democratic world faces an increasing number of hybrid threats, more and more sophisticated, using a variety of tools to influence, challenge and manipulate minds, perceptions, values, habits, psychology of citizens, but also to attack sectors considered to be of critical importance for those specific countries. They have to protect themselves and their people, taking a strong, prompt and efficient response in order to increase their resilience to this kind of threats. One of the fields that hybrid threats actors target is the foreign direct investments (FDI), especially due to the fact that it can go unnoticed and/or to the fact that democratic countries usually have an attractive business environment. Under these circumstances, having in place an effective FDI screening mechanism becomes of paramount importance.

1. FDI screening mechanism in the global context of hybrid threats

FDI can become an important source of economic growth and development for recipient states, having a direct impact in the living standards of the population and in the employment levels, in the research and innovation activities, to the benefit of the citizens. The European Union (EU) is the most important destination for FDI in the world, creating a significant number of jobs and bringing good practices, innovation and new technologies from other states.

In the current complex geopolitical context, the EU has been facing very diverse threats, with a significant potential to impact the lives of European citizens from multiple points of view: economic, social, political, technological, security and public order, climate change, health, weaponization of migration etc. This situation has requested a specific response, that came along starting 2016, but intensified after 2019.

1.1 Hybrid threats – definition

The concept of *hybrid threat* is not a new one; the novelty element to it is the context that determined its use under this name, the resources that are being allocated for this purpose and its specific objective. Most commonly, it is associated with actors, means and techniques challenging the security environment in the global and complex dynamic of new technologies, research and innovation, financial crisis, health challenges, international migration, that brought vital changes in the lives of people, that cannot be reversed. What is considered specific to this concept is its objective, the fact that it aims to undermine democratic values and to diminish public trust in the institutions characteristic for this type of governance. It aims the vulnerabilities of democratic societies in different areas, trying to obtain strategic advantages through subversive activities, using more or less conventional methods (cyber-attacks, information manipulation, weaponization of migrants etc.) (Countering hybrid threats 2022). Such threats are: massive disinformation campaigns, using social media to control the political narrative or to radicalize, recruit and direct proxy actors (*Hybrid Threats, EC - Defence Industry and Space*).

The EU's response to cyber threats is based on four lines of action:



Figure no. 1: The lines of action of the EU counter-hybrid threats policy (Countering hybrid threats, March 2022)

According to *The landscape of Hybrid Threats: A conceptual model* (Giannopoulos, Smith and Theodoridou 2021, 9-10), what individualizes this concept from similar others is the fact that *it is the only one that raises the issue of systemic vulnerabilities of democratic systems as particular targets and clearly argues for comprehensive approach with civil-military cooperation from the very beginning*. At the same time, the activities included in hybrid threats category are: interference, influence, operations, campaigns and warfare/war.

The conceptual model that the Joint Research Centre, the European Commission's science and knowledge service and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE) propose focuses on four pillars: actors (who can make such threats, how they think), tools (what are the means to create this kind of threats), domains (what are the areas that are critical for a state) and phases (activities depending on their escalation potential) (Giannopoulos, Smith and Theodoridou 2021, 4-5, 26, 36).

Taking into consideration the importance of building resilience to hybrid threats, a proposal for a systems-thinking approach on hybrid threats, called CORE model, has emerged

(Jungwirth R., Smith, H., Willkomm E., Savolainen J., Alonso Villota M., Lebrun M., Aho A., Giannopoulos G. 2023). In the center of the model there are seven foundations of democratic systems (political responsibility/accountability, rule of law, stability, foresight capabilities, reliability/availability, civil rights/liberties, feeling of justice/equal treatment). The other elements of the model are: the domains (political, public administration, legal, intelligence, diplomacy, military defence, infrastructure, economy, space, cyber, information, social/societal, culture), the spaces (civic, governance and services) and the levels that exist in society (local, national, international).

1.2 The EU approach on FDI screening mechanism

EU has been, traditionally, a promoter of the free market, of the principle of free movement of capital and it has been relying on the Single Market in order to promote resilience in strategic domains (such as: energy, defense, technology, health etc.), to advance competition, better products and services, digitalization, in order to lower economic dependencies and limit economic coercion, to promote partnerships and alliances with countries with similar interests and that share similar values and security concerns.

FDI is a subject located at the intersection of several areas, in particular economy and security. It is usually beneficial for a country, bringing tangible (financial, social etc.) and intangible advantages (at the level of global perception regarding a country's business environment and policies). Especially after the international economic crisis and after the Covid-19 pandemic, together with the current geopolitical challenges and the instability from the neighboring areas, the world as we knew changed irreversibly and determined fundamental transformations in societies that also led to concerns related to the access of foreign investors to areas and assets of critical importance for a state's economy. In the context of the above-mentioned conceptual model of hybrid threats, FDI represents one of the tools that states and non-states actors can use in order to achieve their objectives and target identified weaknesses of a country.

From 1995 to 2022, the number of countries that adopted a new regulatory framework regarding FDI screening due to national security reasons increased to 37. In EU, there still are 5 member states that do not have an FDI screening mechanism in place (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece and Ireland). In the course of time, the main changes in the respective legislation concerned several subjects: (i) an expansion of the scope of sectors targeted by the screening mechanism to include new sectors considered to be of strategic importance; (ii) a reduction of the threshold rule that determined the review of the foreign investment; (iii) a broader definition of investment or control that triggers FDI screening; (iv) an extension of initial review timeframes during which authorities can block an investment; (v) the introduction of sanctions and penalties for non-compliance with filing obligations (UNCTAD 2023, 5).

Faced with these significant risks, the reaction of EU started to intensify in 2019, when it adopted a framework to screen FDI through the Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Its formal entry into force was April 2019, but it became fully operational starting the 11th of October 2020. At that time, only 14 member states had screening mechanisms operational. The most important element it introduced was the cooperation mechanism between the member states and the EC to exchange information and to signal concerns related to certain transactions. Other changes introduced by this Regulation are related to the ability of the EC to issue opinions if an investment raises concerns regarding the security and public order of several member states or if it could impact a project or a program of European interest, to the setting of main requirements for Member States who keep or introduce a national screening mechanism ('EU foreign investment screening mechanism becomes fully operational' - EC press release, 9 October 2020). It does not introduce the obligation for the member states to adopt FDI screening mechanisms, although it is recommended for them to do so.

In June 2023, the European Commission (EC) published a ‘Communication regarding a European Economic Security Strategy’, that aimed at promoting EU’s competitiveness, protecting its economic security and partnering with a large range of partners in order to increase the economic security. The Communication announced the need for a proposal to revise the Regulation (EU) 2019/452. The changes to be introduced were mainly about introducing the obligation for the member states to have a screening mechanism in place, improving the cooperation between the member states and the EC, setting a minimum sectoral scope for all member states to screen foreign investments (but leaving their freedom to go beyond this scope according to their national security interests).

At the same time, the proposal intends to extend the scope of the screened transactions also to the ones where the direct investor is ultimately owned by individuals or entities from a non-EU country. The proposed changes come as consequences of the deficiencies of the current system and of the results and the implications of the Xella Magyarország case (C-106/22), Vivendi case (C-719/18) and of the VIG/Aegon CEE transaction.

According to the decision of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) of 13 July 2023 in the Xella case, the Regulation (EU) 2019/452 is not applicable in cases where the investor is a EU company ultimately owned or controlled by non-EU investors. So, Hungary’s decision (through the Hungarian Ministry for Innovation and Technology) to block Xella’s acquisition of Janes es Tarsa Kft on the basis of national interest reasons referred in the Hungarian FDI screening legislation (Act LVIII of 2020). Janes es Tarsa is a Hungarian company, with a Hungarian parent, and it is a strategic company engaged in the extraction of gravel, sand and clay. The acquirer is Xella Magyarország Építőanyagipari Kft, owned by a German company (Xella Baustoffe GmbH), owned by a company from Luxembourg (Xella International SA), which is indirectly owned by LSF10 XL Investments Ltd – the ultimate parent company of the Lone Star group registered in Bermuda, the latter group belonging ultimately to J.P.G., an Irish national. The decision of the Ministry was to prohibit the acquisition due to the possible long-term risks related to the security of supply with raw materials to the construction sector. It should be also mentioned that the regional market share of Janes was of 20,77% and its national market share was of only 0,52%, while approximately 90% of the annual production of raw materials by Janes was purchased by Xella (Börzsönyi, B. 2023). The ECJ concluded that this intervention of the Hungarian state represented a serious restriction of the freedom of establishment and the alleged loss of the supply of raw materials to the construction sector was not a sufficiently serious threat to a fundamental interest of Hungary.

In the Vivendi case (C-719/18), Italy tried to block a hostile bid from the French company for Mediaset SpA, a leading Italian media company, by reasons related to the reduction of media plurality. The ECJ decision ruled that the measures taken by Italy were disproportionate and Vivendi should be allowed to buy Mediaset SpA (Reyntjens, T., Jorna, A. 2023).

In the case M.10102, the EC cleared, on competition grounds, the transaction VIG/Aegon CEE in the insurance field. Also, after Hungary vetoed the transaction based on national security reasons (case M.10494), the EC ordered Hungary to withdraw its veto (Reyntjens, T., Jorna, A. 2023).

1.3 The cooperation mechanism – and the future of FDI screening

In January 2024, the EC presented its main findings regarding the evaluation of the Regulation (EU) 2019/452 (‘Commission Staff Working Document – Executive summary of the evaluation of Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union, accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the screening of foreign investments in the Union and repealing Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council’).

The cooperation mechanism is described in the image below (including its future modifications according to the Proposal).

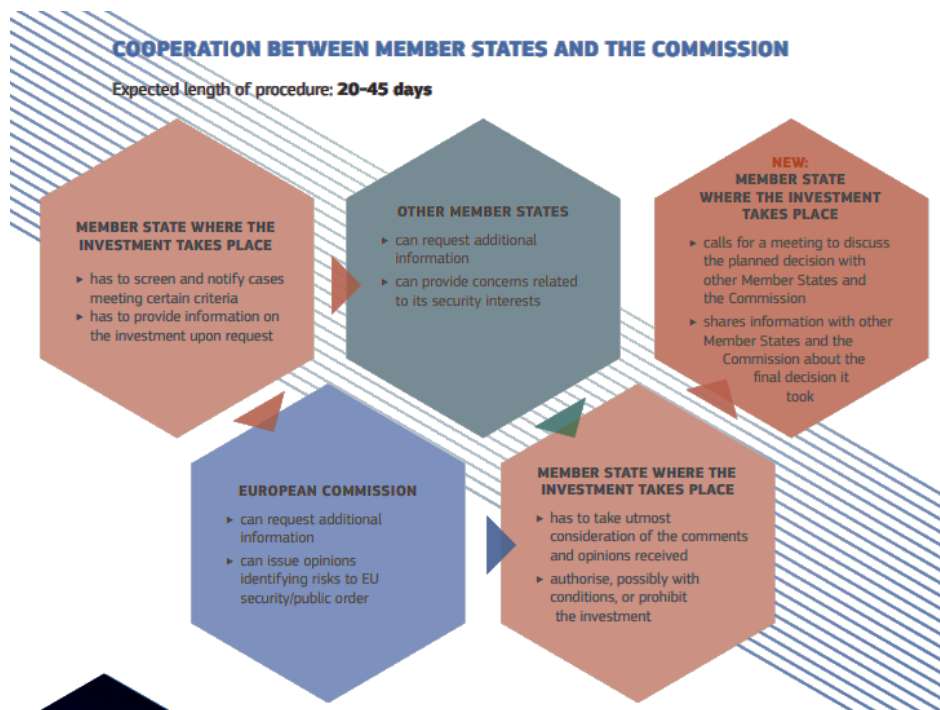


Figure no. 2: The cooperation mechanism
(EU Foreign Direct Investment Screening 2024 Revision, 2024)

There are several assessments of the performances of the cooperation mechanism, the most important ones made by OECD and by the European Court of Auditors. Both of them have signaled issues that need to be addressed, such as: the absence of screening in some member states leaves gaps with substantial and procedural consequences, limitations of the coverage of investment screening mechanisms in member states leave gaps with procedural and substantial consequences, not all member states possess the means to effectively gather information on transactions that are not undergoing screening, not all member states have explicit competencies to effectively act on member states' comments or the EU Commission's opinions, the availability of the instruments of EU Regulation is limited and uncertain when a third country investor invests via a company established in EU, the processing of multi-jurisdiction FDI transactions is inefficient (OECD 2022, 65-83), the member states have the option of determining the scope of their mechanisms in important areas such as what investments to screen; how to establish the notion of control by a third-country entity; which sectors to include as critical for security or public order; and even whether to screen FDI at all, the Commission cannot prohibit FDI transactions, or impose any binding condition upon them, even when EU interests are at stake, member states cannot block FDI in another member state, nor are they obliged to heed other member states' concerns, member states are not obliged to inform the Commission or other member states of the final decisions taken on specific FDI transactions (European Court of Auditors 2023, 19).

At the same time, the EC launched a proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the screening of foreign investments in the Union and repealing Regulation (EU) 2019/452. Some of the main changes that it intends to bring (and which would address some of the weaknesses of the Regulation (EU) 2019/452) concern several subjects detailed below (Wessing, T., 2024).

(i) It makes an obligation for all the member states to adopt a screening mechanism and to consider the transactions in critical areas identified in the annex of the Proposal (e.g. artificial intelligence, semiconductors, biotechnologies etc.). At this moment, the number of member states that have a screening mechanism in place has grown from 14 to 22, the number of transactions screened by the EC and by the member states collectively in the period from 2020 to 2023 was over 1200, the number of cases where the EC issued an opinion was below 3% of the total number of cases that were notified. The main foreign investors whose transactions were notified to the cooperation mechanism came from US, UK, Switzerland, China, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates, while the most frequent sectors where transactions were notified were: energy, aerospace, defence, semiconductors, health, data processing and storage, communication, transport and cybersecurity ('EU Foreign Direct Investment Screening 2024 Revision').

(ii) Regulation (EU) 2019/452 covers only transactions from third countries in the EU, the Proposal extends the scope of the cooperation mechanism to investments made between the member states, where the investor in an EU member state is controlled, directly or indirectly, by a foreign entity regardless of whether the ultimate owner is located in the Union or elsewhere.

(iii) An important change is represented by the inclusion of greenfield investments in the FDI screening mechanism. The establishment of a new company or a new facility that will operate in critical sectors will be covered by the screening mechanism.

(iv) As mentioned at sub-chapter 1.2, transactions involving EU companies will be screened if the EU acquirer is controlled by an investor from a non-EU country (following the Xella case). Transactions with no foreign investor involvement or in which the level of involvement does not lead to the direct or indirect control of the Union entity are not covered by the Proposal.

(v) The portfolio investments are not covered by the Proposal of Regulation.

(vi) After the FDI screening, the final decision remains to the member states, but they have to justify the reason why they did not take action following the recommendations received from other member states or from the EC. The member states can also launch the cooperation mechanism on their own initiative (the comments and recommendations regarding investments that can cause security and public order problems can be submitted without being requested and must be taken into consideration by the member state that analyses the transaction).

(vii) There are currently differences in the screening processes of the member state. They should be reduced in order to ensure predictability for investors and to diminish the associated compliance costs. The core elements of the national screening mechanisms should be harmonized (scope of screened investments, the screening procedure's essential features, the interaction between the national mechanism and the Union cooperation mechanism).

As already mentioned, the Proposal has been launched recently (24 January 2024) and it has to follow the legislative procedure in the European Parliament and in the Council of the European Union. After this phase will be over, it will become operational 15 months after it will come into force. Taking into consideration the elections for the European Parliament in the summer of 2024, the new provisions will most probably begin to be implemented no sooner than 2026.

2. FDI screening in Romania (case study)

2.1. Legal framework

The legal framework for FDI screening in Romania is represented by:

1. The Government Emergency Ordinance (OUG) 46/2022 regarding the implementation measures of Regulation 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments in the Union, as well as for amending and supplementing the Competition Law 21/1996;

2. The Government Emergency Ordinance (OUG) 108/2023 for the completion and modification of the competition law no. 21/1996 and other normative acts;

3. The Decision of the Prime Minister no. 350/2022 regarding the establishment of the Commission for FDI screening (CEISD);

4. The Government Decision (HG) no. 1326/2022 regarding the approval of the Regulation on the organization and functioning of the Commission for FDI screening;

5. The competition law no. 21/1996.

According to OUG 46/2022, the obligation to notify concerned only the foreign investment made by a non-EU investor. In December 2023, according to OUG 108/2023, this legal framework changed, so that the obligation to notify a foreign investment extended also to European investors.

According to art. 3 of the OUG 46/2022 (modified by OUG 108/2023), there are 3 types of foreign investments which are subject to CEISD examination and approval. The first one refers to investments of any nature made by a foreign investor with the aim of establishing or maintaining lasting and direct links between the foreign investor and the entrepreneur or enterprise to which these funds are intended for carrying out an economic activity in Romania, including investments that allow an effective participation in the administration or control of an enterprise carrying out an economic activity. A foreign investment screening is also carried out when there is a change in the ownership structure of a foreign legal person investor, if this change with regard to the legal person makes it possible to exercise control, directly or indirectly, by: 1. a natural person who is not a citizen of a member state of the EU; 2. a legal person whose registered office is not in a member state of the EU; or 3. another legal entity, without legal personality, organized under the laws of a state that is not a member of the EU.

The second one refers to investments from the European Union - investments of any kind carried out by an investor from the European Union with the aim of establishing or maintaining lasting and direct links between the investor from the European Union and the entrepreneur or enterprise to which these funds are intended for carrying out a economic activities in Romania, including investments that allow an effective participation in the administration or control of an enterprise carrying out an economic activity.

The third one refers to greenfield investments – investments in tangible and intangible assets, related to starting the activity of a new enterprise, expanding the capacity of an existing enterprise, diversifying the production of an enterprise through products that were not previously manufactured or a fundamental change in the general production process of an existing enterprise.

These three types of investments have as their object the sectors provided for in art. 2 of the Decision of CSAT no. 73/2012 regarding the application of art. 46 para. (9) of the Competition Law no. 21/1996, republished, with subsequent amendments and additions, by reference to the criteria provided for in art. 4 of the Regulation and their value exceeds the threshold of 2,000,000 euros.

In EU, until the entry into force of the Proposal for Regulation (estimated in 2026), the Regulation in place is the Regulation (EU) 2019/452, which does not apply to cases where the investor is a EU company ultimately owned or controlled by non-EU investors.

The sectors considered of critical importance in the Romanian legislation and in the European Union are stipulated in the CSAT Decision no. 73/2012 and, respectively, in the Proposal for Regulation (see the Table no. 1 below).

Table no. 1: SECTORS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE IN ROMANIAN AND EU LEGISLATION

Romania (according to CSAT Decision no. 73/2012) – areas to be subject to analysis in the case of economic concentrations	EU (according to the Proposal for a Regulation repealing Regulation (EU) 2019/452)
• the security of citizens and communities	<i>1. Projects or programs of Union interest</i>
• border security	<i>2. List of technologies, assets, facilities, equipment, networks, systems, services and economic activities of particular importance for the security or public order interests of the Union</i>
• energy security	• Common list of dual-use items subject to export controls
• transport security	• Common Military List of the EU
• the security of supply systems with vital resources	• Advanced semiconductors technologies
• critical infrastructure security	• Artificial intelligence technologies
• the security of information and communication systems	• Quantum technologies
• security of financial, fiscal, banking and insurance activities	• Biotechnologies
• the security of the production and circulation of weapons, ammunition, explosives, toxic substances	• Advanced connectivity, navigation and digital technologies
• industrial security	• Advanced sensing technologies
• protection against disasters	• Space & propulsion technologies
• protection of agriculture and of the environment	• Energy technologies
• the protection of the privatization operations of enterprises with state capital or of their management	• Robotics and autonomous systems • Advanced materials, manufacturing and recycling technologies

Source: CSAT Decision no. 73/2012, the Proposal for a Regulation repealing Regulation (EU) 2019/452.

The *Projects or programs of Union interest* are: Preparatory Action on Preparing the new EU GOVSATCOM programme, Space Programme, Union secure connectivity programme, Horizon 2020 including research and development programmes pursuant to Article 185 TFEU, and joint undertakings or any other structure set up pursuant to Article 187 TFEU, Horizon Europe, including research and development programmes pursuant to Article 185 TFEU, and joint undertakings or any other structure set up pursuant to Article 187 TFEU, Euratom Research and Training Programme 2021-2025, Trans-European Networks for Transport (TEN-T), Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E), Trans-European Networks for Telecommunications, Connecting Europe Facility, Digital Europe Programme, European Defence Industrial Development Programme, Preparatory Action on Defence Research, European Defence Fund, Act in Support of Ammunition Production, European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act, Permanent structured cooperation, European Joint Undertaking for ITER, EU4Health Programme, Important Projects of Common European Interest.

2.2. Institutional framework

In more than 15 states, “the screening is conducted at ministerial level by authorities in charge of investment matters (e.g., the Ministries of Investment, Industry, Economy, Energy or

Trade). In several cases, however, a separate, ad hoc body was created (or is currently envisaged) to perform the screening and all procedures associated with the mechanism (8 countries). Only 6 countries rely on a national regulatory authority to take on screening duties. Finally, across 22 countries, the authority responsible for investment screening seeks advice from other government agencies or related bodies on the proposed investments, when their expertise is deemed necessary for the decision” (UNCTAD 2023, 11.).

In Romania, the OUG 46/2022 sets the institutional framework involved in FDI screening. The main role is played by the CEISD, which was established in 2022 and which functions as a collegial body without legal personality subordinated to the government. Its members are representatives of the relevant authorities: Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the Romanian Competition Council, Secretariat – General of the Government, the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, the Minister of Finance, the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Health, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Energy. There are also permanent guests from SRI (Romanian Intelligence Service), SIE (Foreign Intelligence Service) and ARICE (Romanian Agency for Investments and Foreign Trade) who are invited to CEISD meetings and who send opinions according to their specific attributions.

The Secretariat of CEISD is provided by the Foreign Investments Directorate, a specialized structure within the Romanian Competition Council. Inside he CEISD also functions a working group of experts from the above-mentioned institutions, whose activity consists in analysis, specialized studies, recommendations or opinions for the CEISD members (taken into consideration when analyzing the authorization requests). According to art. 8 of the Regulation on the organization and functioning of CEISD, CEISD can take into account the well-founded and relevant information received from economic operators, representatives of civil society or social partners, such as trade unions, in relation to a foreign direct investment or a greenfield investment, likely to affect security or public order. CEISD can also ask for a point of view from other authorities or public institutions.

The institutional framework can be graphically represented as follows:

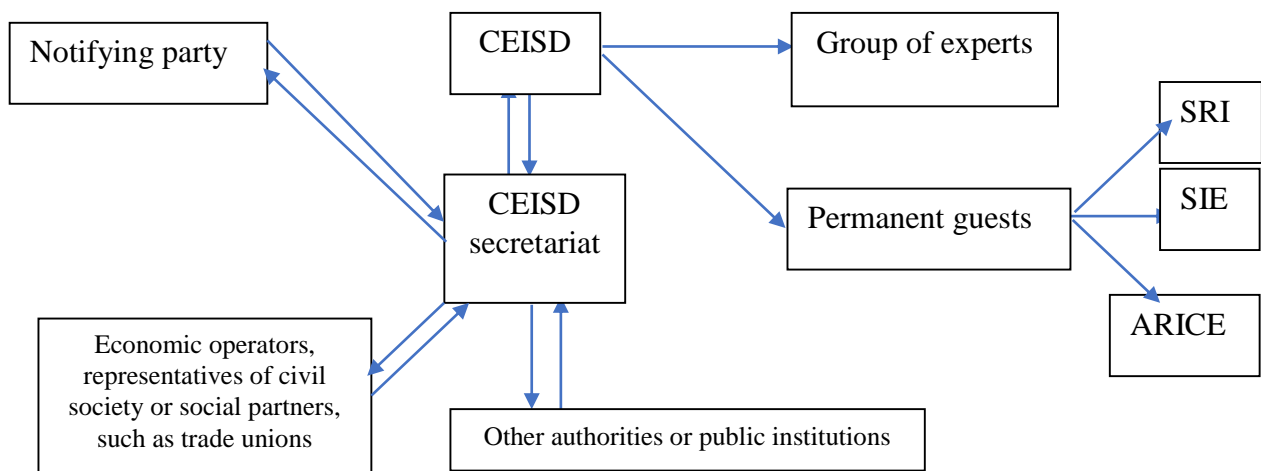


Figure no. 3: Institutional framework in FDI screening mechanism

The timelines for the screening process vary from one member state to another, from two months in Malta to six months in Germany (OECD 2022, 35). In Romania, it is of approximately 7-8 weeks.

The decision flow

After a thorough analysis of the information that was submitted to it or requested by it, CEISD will issue, as appropriate:

a) a foreign investment or greenfield investment *authorization notice* in the event that it considers that this does not affect the security or public order of Romania and is not likely to affect projects or programs of interest to the European Union;

b) a *conditional authorization notice*, in the event that it considers that the FDI or the greenfield investment can be implemented following some behavioral or structural measures/commitments of the foreign investor;

c) a *notice of rejection of the request for authorization*, in case it considers that the FDI or the greenfield investment affects the security or public order of Romania or it is likely to affect projects or programs of interest for the European Union.

In the same time, in case CEISD finds that a foreign direct investment, a greenfield investment or an investment from the EU has been implemented in violation of the provisions of the Regulation or of OUG 46/2022 and it affects the security or public order of Romania or it is likely to affect projects or programs of interest for the European Union, CEISD will issue an opinion proposing the cancellation of the direct investment.

This decision flow is graphically represented below.

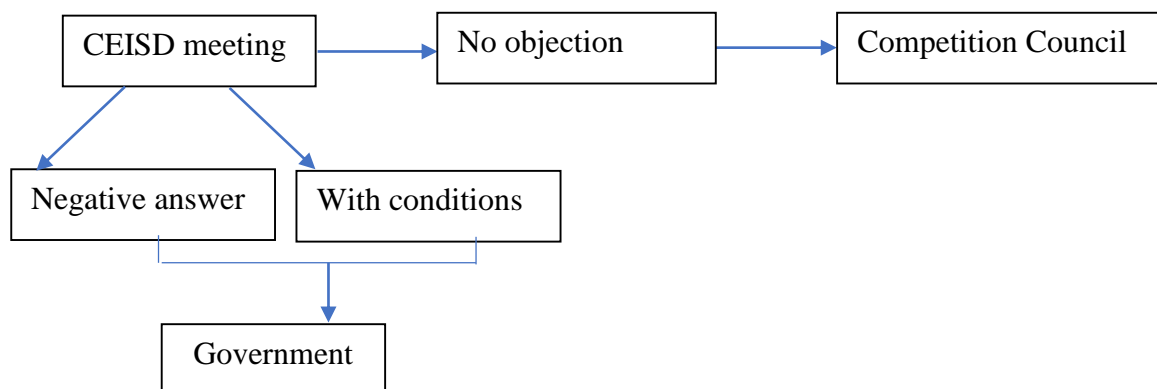


Figure no 4: The decision flow in the FDI screening
(according to the Regulation on the organization and functioning of the CEISD)

Regarding the *cooperation mechanism* with the EC and the other member states, the established point of contact is the CEISD Secretariat, which sends notifications referring to the FDI authorization requests. In case CEISD considers that a foreign investment that is or is not the object of FDI screening in another member state has the potential to affect its security or public order or it has relevant information about that specific FDI or greenfield investment, it can send objections both to the EC and to the member state that does the screening (according to art. 12 of the Regulation on the organization and functioning of CEISD).

Conclusions

In the current interconnected world, FDI screening mechanisms are being used by countries to protect their economies from hybrid threats. As practice has proven, the current system is not bullet proof and, in order to be efficient, it needs some adjustments. Also, countries need to find the right balance between the attractiveness of their FDI regimes and the benefits these investments bring in, on the one hand, and, on the other, the potential risks they pose to security and public order, guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of the investors and also the application of the principles of non-discrimination, proportionality of measures, the accountability of the responsible authorities and the transparency of policies.

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COMPLEX ANALYSIS OF CRYPTOCURRENCIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF MONEY LAUNDERING AND TERRORISM FINANCING

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Abstract: *This study investigates the potential role of Bitcoin in terrorism financing by analyzing the decentralization and anonymity features of cryptocurrencies that facilitate illegal transactions. In the context of delayed regulatory capacity regarding innovations in financial technology, the study explores new opportunities for terrorism financing. International reports, such as that of the financial action task force on money laundering, highlight the growing risks of terrorism financing associated with virtual currencies like Bitcoin.*

While terrorist financing based on emerging technologies enables terrorist organizations to swiftly transfer funds globally, this phenomenon simultaneously increases the difficulties in combating terrorism financing at the national level. In light of this technological revolution and the expansion of terrorism, the study focuses on the interaction between Bitcoin and terrorism, exploring whether terrorist attacks significantly contribute to Bitcoin price fluctuations and to what extent the cryptocurrency may evolve into a currency used for terrorism financing.

Keywords: *cryptocurrencies; blockchain; money laundering; terrorism financing; illegal transactions.*

Introduction

In the context of rapid technological advancements and significant transformations within global financial markets, Bitcoin and blockchain technology have become subjects of particular interest and relevance for both the academic environment and investors in Romania. This investigation focuses on the impact and multiple implications that Bitcoin has on the Romanian financial landscape, addressing aspects related to price volatility, potential diversification benefits in investment portfolios, and crucially, the connections between Bitcoin and specific risks in the Romanian context, including geopolitical and security-related risks.

The first section of the analysis focuses on how Bitcoin could act as a hedge against global risks and geopolitical uncertainties, highlighting how its behavior may influence the economic and financial landscape in Romania in the face of international challenges.

In the second section, the study explores the diversification perspective that Bitcoin can offer to Romanian investors, considering the peculiarities of the local market and how this digital asset can contribute to optimizing portfolios in a specific economic context.

The third section focuses on the controversial aspect of terrorist financing and the impact of terrorist attacks on the price of Bitcoin in the specific context of Romania. Risks and potential vulnerabilities are analyzed from the perspective of national security.

The last section will focus on the potential risk of money laundering through cryptocurrencies in the specific context of Romania, highlighting concerns and implications of this issue on the financial system and national security.

In light of technological advancements and the increasing adoption of cryptocurrencies in Romania, concerns regarding the risk of money laundering have become more pronounced. Cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin, have been associated with potential vulnerabilities to

illegal activities, including money laundering, due to their anonymity features and the difficulty of central monitoring.

Relevant studies indicate a rise in the use of cryptocurrencies in financial transactions in Romania, and this trend may bring with it significant money laundering risks. Bitcoin, due to its privacy features and lack of regulation, can represent an attractive means for those attempting to conceal or launder illegally obtained funds.

Romanian authorities face the challenge of developing and implementing effective regulations to prevent and combat money laundering through cryptocurrencies. Simultaneously, there is an emphasis on strengthening the supervision and monitoring capabilities of cryptocurrency transactions to ensure compliance with international standards and protect the integrity of the national financial system.

This section aims to discuss concerns and risks associated with the use of cryptocurrencies in the Romanian context, emphasizing the need for proactive and efficient measures to prevent their use for illegal purposes, including money laundering.

Through this investigation, a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Bitcoin and the Romanian financial environment is proposed, aiming to illustrate its potential impact and highlight relevant aspects for financial professionals and local investors.

1. Properties of Bitcoin in the context of global financial markets

Over the years 2017-2022, Bitcoin and blockchain technology have become subjects of intense research and discussion, capturing the attention of both the academic community and global investors. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of research during this period, highlighting the evolution and conclusions drawn from recent studies.

In a context marked by intense interest, investigations into Bitcoin and blockchain technology have covered various aspects, reflecting the complexity and broad impact of this innovation on the global financial landscape. At the forefront of these research efforts is the significant contribution of Min Xu, Xingtong Chen and Gang Kou (Xu, Chen and Kou 2019), who conducted a thorough review of the current state of academic research in the blockchain field, focusing particularly on its implications for business and the economy. It is important to emphasize that this work serves as a crucial source for understanding the depth and directions that research has taken in this field.

Their analysis focuses on a substantial sample of 756 articles related to blockchain technology from the Web of Science Core Collection. The results indicate that the most frequently addressed field is Computer Science, followed by Engineering, Telecommunications, Business, and Economics. Particularly interesting is the research in the Business and Economics domain, where the paper identifies key nodes in the literature, such as the most cited articles, the most productive countries, and the most frequent keywords.

By analyzing keyword clusters, five remarkable research themes are highlighted: “economic benefit, blockchain technology⁶, initial coin offerings, FinTech Revolution⁷, and the sharing economy” (Xu, Chen and Kou 2019, 4-14). These directions suggest not only the diversity of approaches in blockchain research but also the significant impact this technology has on the economy, including aspects such as financial innovation and the sharing economy. It is clear that blockchain technology has not only captured the attention of researchers but also

⁶ Blockchain technology is a type of distributed technology initially recognized as the underlying infrastructure for cryptocurrencies, with Bitcoin being the first and most prominent example. However, the concept of blockchain has evolved and has been embraced across various domains due to its features of security, transparency, and decentralization.

⁷ The FinTech Revolution refers to the significant transformations and innovations brought to the financial industry through the use of modern technology.

continues to redefine and shape how we approach finance and business in the digital age. However, the study acknowledges some limitations. The analysis focuses exclusively on literature from the Web of Science Core Collection, which may create gaps in the relevance of existing literature.

Two years later, Helder Sebastião and Pedro Godinho (Sebastião and Godinho 2021) introduces the use of machine learning techniques in developing cryptocurrency trading strategies, highlighting technological advancements in the financial sphere. This research explores the predictability and profitability of machine learning-based trading strategies for three major cryptocurrencies: Bitcoin, Ethereum, and Litecoin. Using linear models, the analysis covers the period from August 15, 2015, to March 3, 2019, with a test sample starting from April 13, 2018.

According to the obtained results, it is evident that individual models exhibit relatively low forecasting accuracy. Their study indicates success in generating returns, but it is crucial to note the associated risk characterized by significant maximum drawdowns and conditional value-at-risk (CVaR) values ranging between 3.88% and 13.40%. A notable aspect is the strategies applied to ethereum and litecoin, which recorded an annualized Sharpe ratio⁸ of 80.17% and 91.35%, demonstrating the ability to achieve positive annualized returns even after considering transaction costs. These findings highlight the promising potential of combining multiple models in developing cryptocurrency trading strategies. However, careful risk management is essential due to the significant volatility in this financial environment (Sebastião and Godinho 2021).

In the context of the same topic, the volatility of Bitcoin, a recent study led by Laith Almaqableh (Laith Almaqableh, Damien Wallace, Vijay Pereira, Vikash Ramiah, Geoffrey Wood, Jose Francisco Veron, Imad Moosa, Alastair Watson 2023) analyzed the underlying factors of this volatility and its impact on global markets. The research specifically explored the connection between anti-drug trafficking activities, including associated arrests, and developments in cryptocurrency markets. This analysis highlighted the degree of criminal involvement in these markets, emphasizing a significant impact of anti-drug trafficking actions on cryptocurrencies.

The study sheds light on the complexity of financial markets and the role Bitcoin can play in the current context of volatility and uncertainty. Understanding the influence of external factors, such as anti-drug trafficking efforts or political uncertainty, can provide investors with meaningful perspectives in decision-making. However, further research is important to refine understanding and more efficiently manage the risks associated with this rapidly changing market.

The most recent approach regarding Bitcoin and blockchain technology involves the geopolitical risks they face, as direct confrontations occur between states and groups of different ideologies and religions. Sovereignty, extreme left or right-wing ideas gain ground even in the most consolidated democracies in the world. The perspective brought by Ahmet Faruk Aysan and his team (Aysan, et al. 2019) highlights the increasing importance of Bitcoin in protective strategies, in a context marked by growing uncertainties globally. To support this observation, the study uses the Ordinary Least Squares⁹ (OLS) method to estimate the relationships between price volatility, Bitcoin returns, and global geopolitical risk (GPR).

⁸ The Sharpe ratio, also known as the Sharpe index, is a measure of the performance of an investment or investment strategy developed by economist William F. Sharpe. This indicator provides an assessment of the investment's return in relation to the assumed risk. The formula for the Sharpe ratio is: $\text{Sharpe Ratio} = (\text{Portfolio or investment return} - \text{Risk-free rate}) / \text{Portfolio volatility}$.

⁹ Least Squares Method (OLS) is a statistical technique used to estimate the parameters of a linear regression model. This method aims to find the regression line that minimizes the sum of the squared differences between the observed values of the dependent variable and those predicted by the model.

Aysan's results indicate a positive connection between price volatility and Bitcoin returns, consistent with the influence that geopolitical events can have on the cryptocurrency.

Additionally, Aysan adds significant nuance through Quantile-on-Quantile¹⁰ (QQ) analyses, showing that these effects are more pronounced at the higher quantiles of both Global Geopolitical Risk and Bitcoin price volatility and returns. This finding suggests that Bitcoin can offer enhanced protection against global geopolitical risks, especially in extreme conditions and periods of significant uncertainty. It is important to underline that these results can provide investors with an understanding that Bitcoin can act as a hedging strategy in situations of geopolitical instability, offering them an additional option in managing their portfolios in the context of a turbulent global financial environment.

The critical opinion expressed by Jamal Bouoiyour, Refk Selmi and Mark E. Wohar (Bouoiyour Jamal, et al. 2019) casts doubt on Bitcoin's ability to act as a safe haven in the face of market risks. This perspective highlights significant obstacles and challenges facing Bitcoin, including a lack of regulation and excessive speculation. In his study, he started with the idea that Bitcoin functions as a refuge with reduced effectiveness in the short term, contrary to the expectations of investors seeking assets to reduce portfolio volatility in the face of extreme events, such as uncertainty associated with unexpected outcomes of US elections. Their analysis adds an interesting nuance to the attractiveness of Bitcoin. It is emphasized that, given the current loss of confidence in the stability of the banking system and future economic security, Bitcoin has benefited from the volatility present in markets. Its property of existing outside the political borders of a single country gives it potential as a form of protection for the US stock price index in turbulent periods.

The conclusion is that Bitcoin does not fully meet the requirements of a “safe haven” in periods of market turmoil and increased uncertainty. While investors are known to migrate to “safe havens” in such periods, Bitcoin does not possess this characteristic absolutely. As a cryptocurrency, Bitcoin is vulnerable to cyber-attacks that can threaten the stability of its entire system. Therefore, while Bitcoin represents a fascinating idea and an interesting experiment, its characteristics, such as a lack of regulation, excessive volatility, and speculative nature, suggest that it cannot be viewed as a permanent component of investment portfolios but rather as an asset with significant risks in financial history.

2. Bitcoin as a diversification option in investment portfolios

In the context of investments, Bitcoin represents a particularly attractive option for portfolio diversification. Investors, seeking alternative investment options, have noted a significant increase in the integration of cryptocurrencies into their portfolios, according to a study conducted by Fang and his colleagues (Libing Fang, Elie Bouri, Rangan Gupta, David Roubaud 2019). Bitcoin becomes increasingly appealing to investors due to its high average returns and low correlation with other financial assets, as found by Khaled Guesmi and his team in 2019 (Guesmi, et al. 2019).

The latter, in their findings, suggest that all models confirm significant returns and volatility transmission. VARMA (Vector Auto Regressive Moving Average) was the first-order model used for autoregressive components and moving average components. The VARMA (1,1)-DCC-GJR-GARCH model is the most suitable for modeling the common dynamics of a variety of financial assets. This model is a complex combination of multiple economic and financial models used to analyze and forecast the common dynamics of a set of financial assets.

¹⁰ Quantiles-on-Quantiles (QQ) is a method used in statistics and data analysis to compare the distributions of two data sets. It involves comparing the quantiles (values that delineate fixed proportions of a distribution) of one variable with the corresponding quantiles of another variable.

Firstly, VARMA stands for Vector Autoregressive Moving Average, a statistical model used for analyzing time series.

The second is DCC (Dynamic Conditional Correlation), which models and forecasts the dynamic conditional correlations between variables in a matrix. In fact, it is a good tool for studying the volatility of these virtual currencies, as it takes into account changes over time in the correlations between financial assets. The last model is GJR-GARCH (Generalized Autoregressive Conditional Heteroskedasticity), which measures asymmetry in volatility. GARCH is a model used to describe the conditional variation of volatility in financial time series. The “GJR” prefix indicates the presence of asymmetry in the impact of positive and negative events on volatility.

Thus, Guesmi and colleagues, through their combined model, concluded the complex relationships between financial variables, as well as the dynamics of volatility in a dynamic and conditional manner, and provided ways to hedge against Bitcoin volatility in investment. The mentioned research shows that hedging strategies involving gold, oil, stocks, and Bitcoin significantly reduce portfolio risk compared to the risk of a portfolio consisting exclusively of gold, oil, and stocks. These findings underscore the importance of a well-thought-out approach to portfolio management, where Bitcoin plays a significant role in optimizing and reducing risks associated with investments (Guesmi, et al. 2019).

In an economic climate characterized by uncertainties, Elie Bouri, Rangan Gupta and Xuan Vinh Vo (Bouri, Lupta and Vo 2020) brings to attention the perspective that Bitcoin may represent a viable alternative to the traditional stock market while offering diversification benefits for investors. According to the results obtained from his research, the price behavior of all investigated cryptocurrencies is turbulent, but notably, only Bitcoin jumps seem to be influenced by developments in the geopolitical risk index. This finding regarding the significant co-jumps of Bitcoin appropriately complements previous research suggesting that this cryptocurrency can act as a hedge against geopolitical risk.

By highlighting this link between Bitcoin developments and geopolitical factors, the role of this cryptocurrency in investment portfolios is emphasized, providing investors with a diversification option and a potential form of protection against geopolitical uncertainties. It is important to note that this approach not only complements but also strengthens the existing perspective on Bitcoin as an asset with distinctive characteristics and adaptability potential in volatile economic environments (Bouri, Lupta and Vo 2020).

These results underline the importance of a profound understanding of the complex relationships between Bitcoin and external factors, such as geopolitical risk. Investors could benefit from including Bitcoin in their portfolios, considering not only the potential for attractive returns but also its potential to act as a protective element against fluctuations and unforeseen geopolitical events. However, it is essential to consider the risks associated with cryptocurrency investments, given their volatile nature and market specificity. Thus, Bitcoin not only offers investors the potential for value growth but also an opportunity to efficiently diversify portfolios in a continuously changing financial environment.

Further explanations and suggestions come from the study conducted by Muhammad Owais Qarni and Saiqb Gulzar (Qarni and Gulzar 2021), which highlights that Bitcoin can make a significant contribution to portfolio diversification, especially when alternative foreign currencies are involved in the forex market. The objective of this research was to analyze how the volatility transferred from Bitcoin affects the foreign currency pairs of major trading currencies. The results obtained through volatility transfer index methods and frequency connectivity provided evidence of low integration, asymmetric volatility transfer, and a dominant role of short-term frequency connectivity between Bitcoin markets and foreign

currency pairs denominated in major trading currencies. These patterns vary over time, responding to various domestic and global events (Qarni and Gulzar 2021).

Against the backdrop of Bitcoin's rapid growth and increasing investor confidence, a significant acceleration of cryptocurrencies is observed. However, history indicates that rapid appreciation is often followed by equally rapid depreciation. Even after Bitcoin has experienced a significant loss of its value, evidence shows a continued downward trajectory over time. Despite some concerning forecasts, a collapse of Bitcoin seems to have no significant impact on financial markets. The low integration of Bitcoin markets with the forex market suggests significant implications for portfolio diversification and risk minimization (Qarni and Gulzar 2021).

The conclusion of the mentioned studies is that, in the context of a constantly changing financial market and associated uncertainties, investors could benefit from the information provided by this research. Using Bitcoin investment as a form of protection against risks associated with the forex market and, at the same time, adding foreign currency investments to portfolios can represent effective strategies for risk diversification. Thus, portfolio managers and investors can adjust their portfolios intelligently, minimizing risk and optimizing potential returns in a complex financial environment.

3. Impact of terrorism and geopolitical risk on the Bitcoin market

In recent years, the volatility of the Bitcoin market has been the subject of thorough research, and one of the factors that has captured attention is the impact of terrorism and geopolitical risk on cryptocurrency prices. Recent studies have identified significant links between geopolitical risk and Bitcoin price dynamics, highlighting the influence of terrorist acts on this ever-evolving market. Pankaj C. Patel and Jack Richter (Patel and Richter 2020) examines the complex relationship between terrorist attacks, the macroeconomic environment, and their impact on investment perspectives. His findings emphasize that terrorist attacks have a significant impact on the macroeconomy, leading to a decline in investor confidence and negatively influencing Bitcoin yields. This analysis highlights the sensitivity of the Bitcoin market to terrorist events and how investors' perceptions of economic stability can influence cryptocurrencies.

The results obtained indicate that the monthly proportion of successful terrorist attacks has a significant effect on the monthly decrease and increase in cryptocurrency yields. It is observed that the success in terrorist attacks is negatively associated with cryptocurrency yields, while the number of injuries and deaths is negatively and positively associated with these yields, respectively. Furthermore, the success in terrorist attacks has the greatest impact on yields compared to the number of injuries and deaths. These findings are robust and persistent even when controlling for cross-sectional correlation between major cryptocurrencies (Patel and Richter 2020).

The analysis suggests that cryptocurrencies may represent a weak hedge against successful terrorist attacks. The results are consistent for cryptocurrencies in the first three quarters of market capitalization, and mediation analysis suggests that terrorist attacks negatively affect yields through the short-term decline in the macroeconomic cycle. This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding the complex connections between geopolitical events, the economy, and crypto markets, highlighting the need for robust and diversified investment strategies in the face of global turbulence (Patel and Richter 2020).

In light of the heightened global geopolitical risks and the frequency of terrorist acts, asset evaluation, including cryptocurrencies, was examined by Afees A. Salisu, Lukman Lasisi and Jean Paul Tchankam in a recent study (Salisu, Lasisi and Tchankam 2021). An empirical model was formulated to estimate the vulnerability of advanced economies, including the G7 and Switzerland, to global geopolitical risk (GPR) and to assess the predictive capacity of this global risk factor. The basic hypothesis was that stock market investments decline during

periods of high geopolitical risks. For analysis, a predictive model was developed, and the dataset included historical stock market indices covering over a century of monthly data for eight advanced economies. In addition to the cumulative index for the historical geopolitical risk index (GPR), two variants of this index, GPRA¹¹ and GPRT¹², were considered. The first covers all "acts" constituting GPR, such as war, nuclear invasion, and terrorism, while the second represents threats associated with these acts (Salisu, Lasisi and Tchankam 2021).

The conclusions of their study revealed that GPR is a significant predictor of stock market yields in advanced economies, except for Italy. It was also found that the stock market suffers greater impacts from threats of geopolitical risks (such as war and terrorism) than from their actual occurrences. It is noted that advanced stock markets are vulnerable to GPR and therefore cannot function efficiently as protection instruments against this type of risk. This is supported by the negative sign of coefficients for GPR variants. It is also observed that models considering GPR variants outperform the reference model, both for estimates made during the analysis period and for those made outside this period. An extended model that includes another important global factor, the price of oil, supports this assertion and consolidates the robustness of the GPR-based model against other additional predictive factors (Salisu, Lasisi and Tchankam 2021).

Regarding this topic, in addition to the study on the link between virtual currency volatility and global markets, Laith Almaqableh and her team (Almaqableh, Reddy, et al. 2022) adds an interesting perspective on risk transfer generated by terrorist attacks. He finds that despite the positive contribution to cryptocurrency yields, these attacks also lead to short-term risk transfer behaviors between different cryptocurrencies. Using daily cryptocurrency yields and event study methodology, abnormal cryptocurrency yields around terrorist activities were estimated. Asset valuation models were adjusted with interaction variables to identify the impact of individual attacks, and ARCH¹³ models were used to determine changes in systematic risk. The conclusions indicate that terrorist attacks positively contribute to cryptocurrency yields and simultaneously induce short-term risk-changing behavior for different cryptocurrencies. The overall conclusion is that cryptocurrency market yields are positively associated with terrorist attacks, generating positive abnormal yields. Based on the augmented CAPM¹⁴ model, the cumulative abnormal yield 180 days before attacks was 98.35%, with other window horizons displayed. Statistical values indicate that these results are statistically significant. In conclusion, although several platforms have accused cryptocurrency markets of hosting illegal activities, such as terrorist activities, none of these forums have provided empirical evidence (Almaqableh, Reddy, et al. 2022).

Therefore, a detailed analysis of the links between terrorism, geopolitical risk, and Bitcoin prices provides an essential perspective on how geostrategic events can influence the dynamics of this emerging market. Investors and financial decision-makers should pay increased attention to these aspects to better understand Bitcoin's behavior in the context of geopolitical risks.

¹¹ GPRA represents a variant of the global geopolitical risk index and covers all "acts" that constitute GPR. These acts can include events such as war, nuclear invasions, and terrorism.

¹² GPRT represents another variant of the global geopolitical risk index and focuses on the threats associated with the acts that make up GPR. It analyzes the threats associated with events such as wars, nuclear invasions, and terrorist acts.

¹³ ARCH (Autoregressive Conditional Heteroskedasticity) models represent a class of economic models that address the conditional variability of a time series, i.e., conditional heteroskedasticity. This conditional variability means that the variance or volatility of the time series can vary based on the information available in the past.¹⁴ The Capital Asset Pricing Model (CAPM) is a theoretical framework used in finance to assess the price of a financial asset and determine the expected return for such an asset. It was developed to provide a method for evaluating the expected return for an asset based on its risk and the overall market return.

¹⁴ The Capital Asset Pricing Model (CAPM) is a theoretical framework used in finance to assess the price of a financial asset and determine the expected return for such an asset. It was developed to provide a method for evaluating the expected return for an asset based on its risk and the overall market return.

Much more detailed and informative, the study conducted by Yu Song, Bo Chen and Xin-Yi Wang (Song, Chen and Wang 2023) explores the interactions between terrorist incidents and Bitcoin prices, providing important information for risk analysis in this area. The results indicate that Bitcoin investors are more concerned about the number of deaths following terrorist attacks than their frequency. Furthermore, the impact of Bitcoin prices on terrorist attacks is considered negligible, suggesting that Bitcoin, while potentially a means of financing terrorism, currently does not play a significant role in this regard.

The study emphasizes that in a period of continuous development of cryptocurrencies, decision-makers in developed countries and developing economies should be aware of the risks of terrorism, which can significantly influence Bitcoin price volatility. In the context of these risks, interest in the connection between terrorists and the use of cryptocurrencies for funding terrorist activities has increased in recent years (Song, Chen and Wang 2023).

The study's methodology, based on the TVP-SV-VAR (Time-Varying Parameter Stochastic Volatility Vector Autoregressive) model¹⁵, reveals the variability of attributes over time at different horizons and moments. Empirical results highlight that terrorist incidents and the level of brutality have a significant impact on Bitcoin prices, with positive correlations in certain periods and negative correlations in others. The study also addresses the effects of severe event shocks of political and economic uncertainty on the relationship between terrorist attacks and Bitcoin prices. The authors conclude that investors should consider not only the direct impact of terrorist attacks on Bitcoin prices but also the diverse interferences of economic or political uncertainties on financial markets (Song, Chen and Wang 2023). The emergence of cryptocurrencies is the result of technological progress that has led to the evolution of the financial market.

In this regard, it is essential for the government to improve regulatory mechanisms, simultaneously supporting the development of the virtual currency Bitcoin. Yu Song's study comes with a series of proposals for investors, economists, and politicians. Based on the aforementioned research, this analysis suggests some policy recommendations. Firstly, the impact of terrorist attacks on Bitcoin prices is variable over time and volatile, making Bitcoin an extremely speculative asset without clear risk protection properties. Therefore, investors should carefully manage their investments and avoid risks related to market fluctuations and possible Bitcoin market crashes by adopting portfolio diversification strategies. Secondly, the government and the industries involved should strengthen technological security and network protocols to ensure the orderly development of cryptocurrency markets. Regulatory authorities should maintain strict supervision over Bitcoin transactions, investigate fake news and malicious media speculation, and ensure the protection of investors' interests. Thirdly, there are misunderstandings internationally regarding Bitcoin regulation, favoring money laundering activities and speculation (Song, Chen and Wang 2023).

Although Bitcoin cannot be considered a suitable supporter of terrorist activities, careful monitoring of Bitcoin prices and ransomware attacks is imperative. The government should enforce laws and regulations regarding taxation, anti-money laundering, and other aspects. For example, anti-money laundering rules should prohibit anonymous transactions in cryptocurrencies. In conclusion, countries should actively cooperate, share information, and firmly regulate the global Bitcoin market to prevent illegal transactions and create a unified regulatory framework (Song, Chen and Wang 2023).

In the context of these conclusions, it is essential for investors to organize their investment strategies reasonably, avoiding financial market risks and possible declines in the

¹⁵ The TVP-SV-VAR model is an advanced statistical method used in time series analysis, focusing on economic models with time-varying parameters and stochastic volatility.

Bitcoin market. The presented studies thus contribute to improving the theoretical system for combating terrorist financing and maintaining global peace and security, offering valuable perspectives for investment decisions and managing risks associated with cryptocurrencies.

4. The risk of money laundering through cryptocurrencies and terrorist financing in the specific context of Romania

In the recent activity reports of the National Office for Preventing and Combating Money Laundering for the period 2019-2022, sporadic mentions of cryptocurrencies are found, predominantly in a general criminal context, without specifically addressing cases related to virtual currencies (Context 2023).

The 2019 report includes two references to cryptocurrencies. The first indicates regular participation in self-training sessions on virtual currencies and associated service providers. The second mentions "speculation with virtual currencies" as part of the crimes for which Romania received information requests, providing a total of 295, without details regarding the distribution by types of offenses (Context 2023).

In the 2020 report, it is highlighted that out of the 242 information requests received, three were related to terrorism financing cases, while the other 239 were linked to suspicions of money laundering stemming from various crimes, including fraud related to exchange platforms or online trading and tax evasion (Context 2023).

The 2021 report emphasizes that high-value receipts of unverified origin from cryptocurrencies were a frequently encountered indicator in reports of suspicious transactions submitted by reporting entities (Context 2023).

In 2022, the establishment of a structure with exclusive responsibilities for overseeing service providers between fiat currencies and cryptocurrencies is mentioned, and reports of suspicious transactions highlight high-value receipts from cryptocurrencies as a suspicion indicator (Context 2023).

The Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) deals with crimes involving cryptocurrencies, such as the creation of criminal groups, money laundering, and drug trafficking. Although prosecutors investigate cases involving cryptocurrency transactions, the institution does not have detailed statistics (Context 2023). Also, the National Agency for the Management of Seized Assets (ANABI) manages assets confiscated as a result of crimes, including virtual currencies. ANABI has organized public auctions for the realization of virtual currency and recorded a court decision to confiscate 0.00257563 Bitcoin in 2022 (Context 2023).

Cryptocurrencies are most often associated with crimes in cases related to drug consumption and trafficking, as well as in cases of fraud and the formation of organized criminal groups. Recently, a fraud case involving approximately \$5 million and cryptocurrencies led to the arrest of three defendants and the placement of ten others under judicial control (Context 2023).

The Office responsible for combating money laundering in Romania faces the absence of specialized software for blockchain investigation, despite the registration of an increase in cryptocurrency-related crimes. The Moneyval report, elaborated by European experts, emphasizes that the implementation of this computer system should have been completed by the end of 2022 or the beginning of 2023 (Biro and Leonte 2023).

At the end of June 2023, Context.ro presented a report highlighting the lack of information regarding the volume of money laundered through cryptocurrencies in Romania. Despite the increasing phenomenon of virtual currency crimes, state institutions lack statistics on this new criminal trend (Biro and Leonte 2023).

The National Office for Preventing and Combating Money Laundering (ONPCSB), the central institution in the fight against money laundering, faces significant challenges, lacking access to dedicated blockchain analytical tools for monitoring and analyzing transactions with

virtual assets. The current situation shows that there are no visualization tools, and the analysis of account statements is done in Microsoft Excel. This aspect generates significant problems regarding the quality and promptness of analysis, contributing to the limited dissemination of information to prosecutors regarding individual transactions, excluding patterns and complex transaction schemes (Biro and Leonte 2023).

European experts in the Moneyval report emphasize that, despite the growth of cryptocurrency-related crime, Romanian authorities do not have statistics on this emerging criminal trend. Additionally, investigations into cybercrime, including those related to cryptocurrencies, are not a priority in Romania, and the lack of specialized software for blockchain investigation exacerbates this situation (Biro and Leonte 2023).

The report reveals that Romania faces an underground economy of approximately 30% of GDP, and the investigation and prosecution of money laundering are not prioritized, with a low number of investigations and convictions in this field. Even though organized crime groups of Romanian origin represent a major external threat for money laundering globally, the effectiveness of investigations in this regard is limited, and Romania lacks comprehensive statistics on investigations, prosecutions, and convictions in the field of money laundering (Biro and Leonte 2023).

Moneyval experts propose solutions that include increasing technological and human resources within ONPCSB, improving the capacity for financial investigations and asset tracking, developing practical guidelines for prosecutors, and enhancing existing controls to ensure the accuracy and updating of information about real beneficiaries (Biro and Leonte 2023).

Conclusions

During the period 2017-2022, Bitcoin and blockchain technology garnered global attention, becoming central subjects of research and discussions in the academic community and among investors. Research from various fields, such as computer science, engineering, telecommunications, and business, has highlighted the complexity and impact of this innovation on the global financial landscape.

The main research directions covered diverse aspects, including the impact of blockchain on corporate and market efficiency, security and privacy, digital currency management, cryptocurrency regulation, the integration of blockchain and FinTech, as well as cross-chain technology for efficient data exchange across different industries. The application of blockchain technology in companies has been recognized as having the potential to bring significant benefits, addressing regulatory requirements, providing financial solutions, facilitating data storage and sharing, as well as managing the supply chain and smart transactions.

In the context of volatile financial markets, Bitcoin has been studied as a possible refuge for investors during periods of global uncertainty. Studies show that Bitcoin can act as a hedge against geopolitical risks, although there are also critical voices emphasizing obstacles and challenges associated with this cryptocurrency, such as the lack of regulation and excessive speculation.

Regarding Romania, during the period 2019-2022, reports from the National Office for Preventing and Combating Money Laundering in Romania revealed sporadic concerns regarding cryptocurrencies. The lack of specialized software for blockchain investigation and limited information about money laundering through cryptocurrencies constitute major challenges. Proposals include increasing resources and improving investigative capacity, emphasizing the need for effective regulations in the complex context of cryptocurrencies.

In conclusion, Bitcoin is becoming increasingly attractive to investors as a significant option for portfolio diversification, and recent research supports this perspective. The attraction to Bitcoin is due to its consistently high average returns and low correlation with other financial assets.

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CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION PERSPECTIVE: FROM DIALECTICAL EVOLUTIONS TO A DISTINCT APPROACH

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Abstract: *The article presents some ideas and reasonings about the acquisition by the European Union of the role of recognized actor in the field of crisis management. The author elucidates a progress in the development of the political-legal and institutional framework for crisis management, adopting a comprehensive approach that combines diplomacy, prevention, and civil and military interventions. The research contains an analysis of the path towards the development of a distinct European Union approach to crisis management.*

The author identified the criticisms of the EU in this area and delineated the significant challenges facing the EU on various dimensions, including the diversity of member states' interests and limited resources in certain areas. The perspectives include the need for continued adaptability, strengthening of response capabilities, and a strong commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation. Through these combined efforts, the EU can strengthen its role as an effective global actor in international crisis management.

Keywords: *crisis management; European Union; comprehensive approach; mechanism; prevention; challenges.*

Introduction

The crisis management in the European Union (EU) approach represents a complex and coordinated process, designed to effectively address different types of crises, from natural disasters to anthropogenic emergencies and complex geopolitical conflicts. The EU's approach in the field of crisis management is characterized by its comprehensive, collaborative and multidimensional nature, involving different actors and covering a wide spectrum of activities, from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery. In this sense, the approach reflects the complex and interconnected challenges facing the international community, requiring coordinated efforts at both European and international levels. The crisis management process in the view of the European Union is based on a framework structured in six essential stages: 1) crisis anticipation and prevention, 2) crisis preparation, 3) early warning, 4) crisis response decision, 5) response coordination, and 6) post-crisis review and learning. These stages facilitate a coordinated and effective approach, starting with the preventive identification of potential crises and ending with the evaluation of the crisis response for future improvements.

Reflecting on the research on the EU foreign policy, it is important to appreciate the quality of the EU as a recognized external actor in terms of crisis management, thus accepting the idea of the existence of a European approach to crisis management. However, certain similarities and differences between the European approach to crisis management and the American one have been identified that are important to remember. Indeed, there is scholarly research analyzing this topic, although comparing the EU with the US is known to present methodological challenges due to differences in the nature and structure of the two entities.

Highlighting certain key aspects of the research, we will start from the essence and nature of the European approach on crisis management. In this sense, the studies focus on identifying the distinctive features of the EU's foreign policy, such as the emphasis on multilateral diplomacy, conflict prevention, and the use of soft power instruments, especially with regard to the civil protection mechanism. (Tulmets 2008) Referring to the EU's foreign policy capabilities and structure, the paper starts with the analysis of how the EU's institutional structures, including decision-making processes and interaction between member states, influence its external approach. Comparing it to US foreign policy, differences in US approaches tend to be unilateral and often supported by a significant military presence, and the influence of domestic politics and national capabilities can be determined by studying how EU member states' domestic politics and their nationals' capabilities shape the EU's response to external crises.

In the context of methodological challenges, we mention the fundamental difference that the EU is not a sovereign state like the US, but a political and economic block with a sovereignty distributed among its member states, and this complicates a direct comparison and takes us away from this idea. A vulnerability is the internal diversity of the EU, accentuated by the variety of interests and policies in EU member states, which has already set precedents by leading to an incoherent external response, contrasting with the more uniform approach of the US. Interdependence with other international actors is a *modus operandi* for the EU space, and the EU's foreign policy is often influenced by interactions with other international organizations, unlike the US, which acts more independently.

The element of uniqueness of the European approach is confirmed by the general recognition of a distinct European style in foreign affairs, focused on cooperation, international norms and non-military responses. There is also the need for contextualized analysis, that is, it is essential to take into account the specific context of each foreign policy case. At the same time, the comparative perspective is important, because despite the challenges, the comparison of EU and US foreign policies remains a valuable area of research for understanding the global dynamics and transatlantic relations. In this sense, such an approach helps to elucidate the EU positions and its acts on the global stage and how this differs or resembles the approaches of other major actors such as the US.

1. Dialectical evolutions and peculiarities of the European Union's approach to crisis management

The dialectical developments in EU approach in the field of crisis management also refer to how EU approaches and strategies in this domain have developed and transformed through the dynamic interaction of opposing forces or contradictory ideas. This dialectical perspective highlights the conflicts, adaptations and syntheses that have shaped EU crisis management policy. Some of the key aspects of these dialectical evolutions consisted of centralization vs. national sovereignty, integration vs. divergence, the civil approach vs. military approach, multilateralism vs. unilateralism, adaptability vs. coherence.

Starting with centralization *versus* national sovereignty, we note that the trend towards a centralized and coordinated EU-wide approach to effective crisis management is impacted by the desire of member states to retain their sovereignty, especially in sensitive areas such as foreign policy and defense. That is why it was necessary to create structures that allow closer cooperation, such as the EEAS, while respecting the autonomy of the member states. (Yesilada et al. 2017; Skordas 2018)

Referring to integration (Hosli, Lentschig, and D'Ambrosio 2022) and divergence, the efforts to integrate and harmonize security and defense policies at the EU level have been combined in the context of several divergences in the priorities and political interests of member

states. (Deschaux-Beaume 2008; Deschaux-Beaume 2011) Thus, it was indispensable to formulate some common policies and strategies that take into account the diversity of interests and situations at the national level. (Hagemann 2010; Rieker and Giske 2024)

Invoking the civilian approach *versus* military approach, we identified the EU's preference for diplomatic solutions and civilian approaches in crises management, in conditions where the EU was aware of the need for a military intervention capacity for situations where civilian measures are insufficient. Thus, a balanced amalgam of civil and military instruments was developed, emphasizing the importance of civil-military coordination. (Born, Hans, et al. 2006)

Speaking of multilateralism *versus* unilateralism, the EU's commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation is an obvious one, alongside global trends towards unilateralism and nationalism, as well as the pressures for independent EU action. Under these conditions, a compromise was possible by promoting a multilateral agenda while maintaining the ability to act independently when necessary. (Smejkalová 2012)

Elucidating the adaptability *versus* coherence, we found that there was a need for adaptability and flexibility to respond quickly to changing crises, while imposing the rigors of coherence and continuity in crisis management policies and strategies. Therefore, the optimal solution consisted in the development of strategic frameworks that allow adaptation to specific situations, while maintaining a common direction and objectives. (Koenig 2016; Smith 2021; Dandashly, Assem, et al. 2021)

In the above context, these dialectical developments illustrate how crisis management at the EU level is a dynamic and continuously evolving process, characterized by tensions, compromises and adaptations. Understanding these dynamics is essential for appreciating the complexity of the EU's approach to security challenges and international crises.

The dialectical evolution of the EU's crisis management process reflects a shift towards a more integrated and comprehensive approach, characterized by the blending of military, civilian, diplomatic, and humanitarian tools. This evolution signifies the EU's recognition of the complex nature of modern crises, requiring multifaceted and coordinated responses. The EU's approach now emphasizes preemptive action, capacity-building, and the promotion of stability through a blend of soft and hard power, aiming for long-term conflict resolution and sustainable peace rather than merely reactive or short-term interventions.

In support of the idea that the EU has demonstrated its quality as a recognized actor in crisis management, the European approach has acquired several distinct characteristics and focuses on a number of key aspects. The integrated and multidimensional nature of the approach is due to the successful combination of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, covering various dimensions such as political, economic, humanitarian and social aspects. The central element in crisis management in the EU approach has become the EU civil protection mechanism (Tulmets 2008), through which cooperation between civil protection authorities in Europe is facilitated, providing a coordinated and rapid response to disasters by pooling resources and the capacities of the member states. An important process in crisis management is comprehensive risk assessment, where a regular risk assessment is carried out to identify more potential crises and threats. This involves the risk analysis at the regional and national level, taking into account some factors such as security threats, economic instability and climate change. An innovation of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) is the solidarity clause, with reference in Article 222 of the TFEU stipulating that member states must help each other „in event of terrorist attacks and natural or man-made disasters”. The European Union carries out its activities in the field of crisis management in collaboration with international organizations, i.e. the UN, NATO and the WHO, which has proven to be the most effective way to ensure a globally coordinated response in case of crises. A means by which the EU demonstrates its quality as an important actor in regional and global crisis management is

humanitarian aid and development assistance. Through this instrument the EU validates its status as a major provider of humanitarian aid worldwide, that assistance becoming crucial in managing crises, especially those in regions outside the EU, also related to long-term development support. This approach not only affirms the EU's status as a leading global provider of humanitarian support but also highlights its commitment to addressing both immediate crisis needs and long-term development challenges outside its borders. This strategic use of aid and assistance underlines the EU's integrated approach to crisis management, emphasizing the importance of stability, resilience, and sustainable development in crisis-affected regions. The EU has been involved in various global humanitarian efforts and development assistance programs, including response to natural disasters, conflict zones, and support for refugees. For the most up-to-date examples of the EU's involvement in humanitarian aid and development assistance, please refer to the latest reports and press releases from the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Investing in research and innovation is one way to improve crisis management capabilities through research and technological innovation, with the development of advanced tools for risk assessment, early warning systems and crisis response.

In order to ensure the functionality of this system, there was needed a permanent functional operating structure - the Emergency Response Coordination Center (ERCC), which aims to monitor emergencies at a global level and ensure a rapid emergency support through a coordinated response from EU member states. The EU ERCC and NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC) are two important entities dedicated to emergency and disaster management, both civilian and the context of international security cooperation. The ERCC, part of the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, is created to facilitate a rapid and coordinated response to natural or man-made disasters, both inside and outside the EU. ERCC operates 24/7, monitoring risk situations and coordinating the deployment of humanitarian aid and disaster equipment. This center uses the resources of EU member states, mobilizing response teams, providing technical expertise and ensuring the necessary logistics to respond effectively to crises. On the other hand, EADRCC, which is NATO's main disaster response coordination body, was designed to provide support in the event of major disasters, such as earthquakes, floods or industrial accidents, for both NATO member countries and for its partners. The EADRCC serves as the focal point for coordinating voluntary disaster relief offers between NATO countries and other partner nations in the event of disasters.

The cooperation between ERCC and EADRCC demonstrates the importance of synergy between different regional and international organizations and mechanisms in effective emergency management. This cross-border and multidisciplinary collaboration is crucial to maximize the effectiveness of disaster responses and minimize their impact on affected populations.

The effectiveness of the system is ensured by a political-legal framework - a mandatory condition for ensuring the existence and functioning of the EU by establishing various policies and legislation to strengthen the crisis management procedures, such as the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the EU Strategy on Climate Change Adaptation. The ensuring readiness and improving the effectiveness of joint crisis responses have been made possible by training and exercises, a platform through which joint programs are carried out to achieve more set aims.

A must-have, recognized as vital under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic (Boin and Rhinard 2023), has become the restocking for public health emergencies, which highlighted the importance of public health in crisis management, efforts being channeled towards strengthening the field of public health, improving disease monitoring and coordinating vaccination strategies.

The cyber security has become for the EU an important security dimension issue, which has gained ground with the increasing threats of cyber-attacks. The EU is focusing on strengthening its cyber security capabilities, including establishing a Joint Cyber Unit to coordinate responses to large-scale cyber incidents. The EU Joint Cyber Unit was proposed to strengthen the prevention, deterrence and response to cyber incidents and crises. It was to become operational on 30 June 2022 and be fully established on 30 June 2023, involving collaboration between civil, law enforcement, diplomatic and cyber defense communities, as well as private sector partners. The new EU Cybersecurity Strategy, presented by the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in late 2020, aims to enhance the security of essential services and connected devices. It emphasizes building collective capabilities to counter major cyberattacks and fostering international cooperation for cyberspace security. The strategy introduces the concept of a Joint Cyber Unit to streamline the response to cyber threats by leveraging the collective resources and expertise of the EU and its Member States. The implementation of the EU Cybersecurity Strategy involves enhancing the security of critical infrastructure and digital devices, building collective defense capabilities, and fostering global partnerships for cyberspace stability. A key component is the development of the Joint Cyber Unit to coordinate responses to cyber threats, leveraging EU and member states' expertise and resources. This comprehensive approach aims to protect the EU's digital environment and ensure a safe cyberspace for all stakeholders.

2. Implications of the Treaty of Lisbon for the field of crisis management and critical views on the European approach in this field

Returning to the normative framework, it is worth mentioning the importance of the Treaty of Lisbon, entered into force on December 1, 2009, which brought more significant changes to the institutional framework and decision-making process of the EU, including in terms of crisis management. This treaty strengthened the EU's ability to respond effectively to various types of crises and highlighted several mechanisms and principles. The Article 222 of the TFEU, known as the solidarity clause, is a key element introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, stipulating the obligation of member states to provide mutual aid in the event of a terrorist attack or a natural or man-made disaster. (Mölling and Major 2013) We recall that the Treaty of Lisbon strengthened the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), providing the EU with a favorable framework to develop civilian and military capabilities for conflict prevention and crisis management missions: operations peacekeeping, post-conflict stabilization missions and reconstruction assistance. Headed by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service (EEAS) was created to coordinate the EU's foreign and security policy, namely this structure has an important role in the management and prevention of international crises. (Koops and Tercovich 2020; Blockmans and Wessel 2021) At the same time, a mechanism introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon - Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) allows some member states to collaborate more closely in the field of defense and security, including the development of defense capabilities and the improvement the availability of the armed forces. PESCO and CARD (Coordinated Annual Review on Defense) are EU initiatives to strengthen common European defense. They are reviewed annually in order to align and standardize the national defense planning of the member states according to a common directive. It contributes to strengthening defense capabilities and promoting security and defense cooperation and integration within the EU.

Although the EU civil protection mechanism was not introduced as a novelty in the Treaty of Lisbon, the mechanism was nevertheless strengthened and expanded following the entry into force of the treaty, providing a more effective framework for coordinating responses to natural and man-made disasters within and outside the EU. Due to the Treaty of Lisbon, the need to develop an

EU rapid response capability, including the ability to mobilize battlegroups and intervention forces to respond to crises, has been emphasized. The conflict in Ukraine has underscored the need for the EU to reassess its security and defense strategies, particularly in relation to external aggressions affecting its partners. The European Union Battle Groups (EUBGs), despite their potential, have faced challenges in demonstrating their effectiveness, primarily due to indecision regarding their deployment and utilization in line with their initially intended missions. This situation highlights the necessity for the EU to refine its approach to collective defense and crisis response mechanisms.

Some important steps have also been taken to strengthen and improve internal security cooperation, including in areas such as counter-terrorism, border management and police cooperation. (Nimark 2019)

The treaty increased and strengthened the role of the European Parliament in the decision-making process, including in matters related to the crisis management, as well as national ones. (Auel and Christiansen, 2017) It also formalized the role of the European Council, which acquired an important status in setting strategic directions (Kassim and Tholoniati 2021). With reference to the concept of solidarity, it is capitalized on the energy dimension in the content of Article 194 of the TFEU, introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, it mentions the concept of solidarity in energy policy, which is important both for energy security in general, as well as for the response to energy crises in particular. (Giuli and Oberthür 2023) Through these amendments, the Treaty of Lisbon strengthened the EU's ability to manage a wide range of crises, both internal and international, and marked an important step in European integration and cooperation in the field of security and management crises. This topic has been addressed by certain researchers, who have confirmed the EU's effectiveness in crisis management after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. (Blockmans and Awessel 2009)

Neither the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, nor the recent conflicts in the EU's neighborhood have represented an existential threat to some member states, a fact that generates the assumption that this could be the reason for the failure of the European unity test in joint efforts to prevent or resolve conflicts in its proximity. Another reason is how threat perception (Katsioulis 2022) and the degree of unity of EU member states influence the conflict management efforts in neighboring regions. In this sense, there are several aspects that can contribute to this phenomenon. As we mentioned before about the differences in the perception of threats, as an example we can cite the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus and the Middle East, which were not perceived by the majority of member states as direct existential threats to the EU, a fact that significantly burdened the capacity to appreciate emergency situations and to be aware of the importance of unitary approach to conflicts. As a result, in the absence of a common perception of an immediate threat, the mobilization of unified and coherent responses by member states may be more difficult.

A vulnerability that has already created precedents in other segments represents the diversity of the national interests of the community states up to divergences on certain vital aspects such as geopolitical, economic, cultural-historical, etc., and these can influence the approach of the member states to certain external conflicts. The listed differences implicitly lead to divergences in foreign policy, one of the implications of which is the weakening of the EU's collective efforts to manage crises and prevent conflicts. Another vulnerability is the limits imposed by the CFSP (Štrbac and Milosavljević 2021) (Bergmann and Müller 2021), this being an area in which member states still retain a significant degree of national sovereignty, a fact that can reduce the EU's ability to act effectively and cohesively. In the absence of a truly unified foreign and security policy, the EU faces major difficulties in adopting a firm united position in the face of crises and conflict prevention.

Addressing the topic of available capabilities and tools (Backman and Rhinard 2018), the EU has limited tools for direct military intervention, being predominantly oriented towards diplomacy, economic sanctions and development aid. Consequently, without significant military

capabilities, the EU is perceived as an actor with limited influence in resolving armed conflicts. The dynamics of the international system have demonstrated the weight of international organizations and major actors of the global political scene, and in some cases, conflict resolution may depend more on the actions of major international actors such as the US, China, Russia or other regional powers, but also UN. The created situation may have the effect of reducing the EU's ability to have a significant independent impact in crisis and conflict management.

In conclusion, the lack of a direct existential threat to the EU, together with the diversity of national interests, the limitations imposed by foreign and security policy, along with the dependence on the capacity and will of other international actors, may contribute to increasing the difficulties faced by EU member states in responds unitarily and efficiently to crises/conflicts in the neighborhood. Moreover, the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has been widely recognized by international leaders and officials, including the NATO Secretary General and representatives from the Biden Administration, Poland, and the Baltic States, as not just an act of aggression against Ukraine but a broader threat to European democracy and security. These concerns reflect the broader implications of the conflict, highlighting its potential to undermine democratic values and stability across Europe.

This analysis suggests the need for a more cohesive approach and the promotion of a consolidated position starting from the cultivation of a sense of European identity and the achievement of a common goal within the framework of EU foreign policy.

The Treaty of Lisbon has significant implications for EU crisis management, enhancing the EU's capacity to act through the establishment of the European External Action Service and the position of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This structural reform aimed to streamline and strengthen the EU's external actions. However, critics argue that despite these improvements, there remains a lack of coherence and decisiveness in the EU's crisis management approach, partly due to the consensus-based decision-making process which can delay responses to crises.

The EU's approach to crisis management, although complex and comprehensive, is not without criticism and challenges, with the critical view of how the EU manages crises focused on several aspects. (Casais, 2019) The first and most visible is the bureaucratic and rigid character of the decision-making process, which is considered a problem both by European decision-makers and by scientific researchers concerned with sensitive topics in the field of community policies, but also in the sector of security and defense. (Vanhoonacker, Dijkstra and Maurer 2010) The EU is often criticized for its bureaucratic and slow processes, which can delay the response to crises, and in emergency situations, time is a very important attribute, with decision delays and bureaucratic delays having serious consequences. In the absence of prompt coordination and political cohesion, although coordination mechanisms exist, member states do not always act independently, leading to a fragmented response. A lack of cohesion can therefore undermine the effectiveness of the EU's response and lead to duplication of efforts.

Recalling the limited military response capacity (Smalec, 2014), the EU is largely dependent on NATO and individual member states' capabilities, and under such circumstances the EU's options in crisis management, which require a rapid and effective military response, are limited. (Tomja and Dumani 2023) A sensitive subject within the community political elite, as I mentioned before, is the political and economic differences between the member states, which create problems and prevent the taking of quick common decisions, which has the effect of generating some answers lacking unity and coherence. (McCray 2014)

Another impediment is an excessive dependence on external partners, and the fact that the EU frequently relies on the US or other NATO member states to respond to crises can reduce the EU's independence and complicate the coordination of responses. (Sperling and Webber 2020; Latici 2020) The exponential growth of challenges in managing global crises, such as pandemics

or climate change, requires globally coordinated responses, which can be difficult to achieve due to the sometimes diametrically opposed interests of some states members and the EU's limited ability to influence a number of policies promoted worldwide. Consequently, these limitations impact the EU's ability to assume leadership in the effective management of global crises.

Another sensitive topic is the civic involvement and transparency, which has generated a series of concerns regarding the level of citizen involvement (Simsa, 2017) and the transparency of the decision-making process in the EU (Bambi, 2021). In the absence of transparency and civic activism, the level of trust and support from European citizens decreases significantly, thus the number of followers of Euroscepticism expands its ranks. Crises often evolve rapidly and require flexible responses, while EU structures and procedures have demonstrated rigidity and slowness to adapt, which has limited the EU's ability to respond effectively to dynamic and rapidly evolving crises.

The issue of allocating financial and material resources for crisis management is often a challenge, given limited budgets and predominantly competing priorities, which ultimately results in insufficient resources, affecting the EU's ability to implement effective crisis prevention and response measures.

Even in the area of crisis management in the EU neighborhood, no progress has been made, and the ways of managing crises at its borders, such as the refugee crisis (Bačić, 2015) or migration pressures (Fontana, 2022), have been criticized for the lack of solidarity and unitary approach. Subsequently, the created situation led to certain internal tensions and affected the EU's image and credibility at the international level. During the migrant crisis, significant differences between EU member states were evident. For example, Hungary built barbed wire fences on its borders to stem the flow of migrants, while Germany adopted an open-door refugee policy in 2015. These divergent approaches highlighted the lack of solidarity and policy convergence between member states, complicating the EU's efforts to manage the crisis in a united manner. This lack of coordination and solidarity has complicated the EU's efforts to effectively manage the migrant crisis, underscoring the need for a more unified and coherent approach across the bloc.

3. The comprehensive approach to crisis management in the view of the European Union

The crisis management in the EU's view is characterized by a comprehensive approach, covering a wide spectrum of activities and strategies, from prevention and preparation to response and recovery. This approach reflects the complex and interconnected nature of contemporary challenges, as well as the need for cooperation and coordination between Member States and EU institutions. There are a number of academic synthesis studies (Nunes, 2016) alongside researches that contain reflections on some facets of the comprehensive approach in the EU's vision and are focused on topics such as: challenges and opportunities within a complex crisis management (Jarmyr and Friis 2008); the unfulfilled promises of the EU regarding comprehensive planning in crisis management (Mattelaer, A. 2013); challenges (Weston and Mérand 2015); the analysis of context, lessons learned and policy implications in various fields (Kammel and Zyla 2018) etc.

D.C. Wendling considers that the key principles of this approach in the EU's view are: the development of local capacities in the failed state; the importance of peacekeeping politics, legitimacy, unity of effort, security, conflict transformation and regional engagement. (Wendling 2010)

In our view, one of the main components of this approach is prevention and preparedness, which consists of regular risk assessment at national and European level to anticipate and prevent crises, the development and implementation of emergency plans and response strategies to cope possible crisis scenarios, developing and implementing training programs and simulation exercises

to train response personnel and improve coordination between different agencies and organizations. Along with prevention and preparedness, another key element is the rapid and coordinated response, which includes mechanisms for coordinating EU and international disaster responses, including the mobilization of member states' resources and capabilities, continuous monitoring of crisis situations and coordination of responses at European level, security and defense cooperation, including civilian and military missions to manage international conflicts and crises. (Post and Post 2015)

The recovery and resilience are considered to be highly significant components of the comprehensive approach, meaning support for reconstruction and recovery, expressed through financial and technical assistance to regions and countries affected by crises, the development of strategies to increase the capacity of communities and member states to resist and recover from crises.

A special place was won by international cooperation through global partnerships with international organizations, such as UN, NATO, and other entities to address global crises, providing humanitarian aid to countries outside the EU affected by natural disasters or conflict.

The share of research and innovation has grown exponentially through investments in new technologies to improve crisis monitoring, prevention and response capabilities, through research to better understand crisis dynamics and to develop effective methods of managing them.

The political and legal framework concludes the list of components of the comprehensive approach by focusing on the development and implementation of legislation and policies to strengthen the crisis management capabilities at the EU level, but also by the political commitment of EU leaders to combine their efforts in crisis management and take quick and efficient decisions.

Addressing the institutional component, T. Frunzeti (Frunzeti 2012) considers that by applying the concept of a comprehensive approach to the crisis, the EU strengthens its defense, development and diplomacy components. A structure through which a consolidation of that concept was expected was the European External Action Service and the Crisis Management Planning Directorate (CMPD), institutions that capitalize on both civilian and military components, articulating them around the concept of "civil-military coordination" (CMCO). The latter seems to be one of the most visible realizations of the will to develop a comprehensive approach within the European institutions. There are appreciated the institutional actions, aimed at strengthening civil-military cooperation, ensuring the necessary foundation for civil-military coordination. We remind that the notion "civil-military coordination" in the context of both the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defense Policy elucidates the need for effective coordination of the relevant actions of the EU member states, which are involved in the planning and subsequent implementation of the EU's response to the crisis. The objective was to implement the necessary reforms in the EU to enable effective coordination between civilian and military actors. The document emphasizes the importance of coordination culture, having to create a new organizational routine of coordination. CMCO through institutional and cultural impact was presented as a prerequisite for the implementation of a management crisis in Europe under the Political and Security Committee (PSC). Indeed, the PSC is the one that can reflect when in a moment of crisis all available European options (civilian and military), in order to properly coordinate. Through the concept of crisis management and then through the joint action of the PSC, the mission framework is established in a coherent and coordinated manner, leveraging the concept of crisis management and joint actions. The PSC plays a critical role in the EU's crisis management by evaluating all European civilian and military options to ensure proper coordination during crises. This approach ensures that the EU's response to crises is comprehensive, integrating various strategies and resources for effective resolution. Thus, through this comprehensive approach, the EU aims to effectively manage both internal and international crises, ensuring the security, stability and well-being of its citizens. This involves close collaboration between member states and EU institutions, as well as constant adaptability and innovation to meet changing challenges. The comprehensive approach to crisis management emphasizes the importance of coordination between different actors

in the fields of governance, security, and economic and social development for sustainable and rapid crisis resolution. This strategy promotes collaboration between actors with common visions and effective coordination with other stakeholders, ensuring an integrated and multifactorial approach to solving complex issues.

The comprehensive approach to crisis management in the European Union emphasizes the integration of various policies and tools across different sectors, including security, defense, diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian fields, to address crises effectively. In the context of security and defense, this approach entails close coordination between civilian and military capacities, ensuring that EU actions are coherent, and that resources are used efficiently to prevent, respond to, and recover from crises. This unified strategy aims to strengthen the EU's ability to act as a global security provider, addressing both immediate threats and underlying causes of crises.

The crisis management within the EU in the fields of security and defense faces a number of complex challenges, reflecting the dynamic nature of the global security environment, the geopolitical complexity of the contemporary world, the unique essence of the EU as a supranational entity, as well as the structural and political specificities of EU alongside its internal dynamics. Among the most significant challenges are transnational and hybrid ones, diverging interests of member states, dependence on NATO and external allies, limited military and civilian capabilities, budgetary and resource pressures, responding to regional and global crises, integrating security policies and defense, legitimacy and public support.

Starting from the most significant security and defense challenge, the diversity of member states' interests, we remark that EU member states have various national interests and often different priorities in terms of security and defense, and as a result certain difficulties may arise in formulating an effective common policy and to some incoherent responses to crises. The effective integration and coordination of civilian and military resources and capabilities in crisis management is indispensable for strengthening civil-military cooperation, and close collaboration between different agencies and bodies, both at EU and Member State level, would ensure cohesion in this sense.

The EU does not have the same military resources as some major national powers, such as the US, and this limits the EU's options for direct military interventions and requires greater reliance on diplomatic and economic policy. Many EU member states are also NATO members and rely on the transatlantic alliance for their security (Latici 2020), and as a result the development of an autonomous EU approach to security and defense may be complicated. Confronting transnational threats such as terrorism, cyber-attacks and humanitarian crises requires the EU to adopt a global approach in the context of international cooperation to face these challenges. (Pașcu and Chiriac 2022). Contemporary crises can develop quickly and have multiple dimensions (political, humanitarian, military), which conditions the EU to react quickly and develop adaptive plans.

The tensions between national sovereignty and European integration in the field of security and defense (Perez Bustamante, 2023) also create difficulties in the delegation of security powers at the supranational level. (Ekengren and Hollis, 2020) The allocation of financial resources for defense and security is often limited by national budgetary constraints, and this limits the EU's abilities to invest in new security and defense initiatives.

Public opinion in different member states can be divided regarding commitment to military actions or security policies, which can create difficulties in gaining public support for EU security interventions or policies. With reference to the evolution and adaptation of security strategies, we mention the need to adapt to new types of threats (Jacuch 2020) and to develop appropriate security strategies (Shcherbak 2021), a situation that can generate challenges in updating and modernizing approaches of security and defense at EU level.

Therefore, the stated challenges highlight the complexity and difficulty of managing the security and defense sector in such a diverse and interconnected block as the EU. To meet these challenges effectively, a coordinated and flexible approach is needed, which takes into account the diverse interests of member states and the changing dynamics of global security.

Conclusions

The EU's distinctive crisis management approach involves advancements in political, legal, and institutional frameworks, alongside a comprehensive strategy that merges civilian and military resources. All of them reflect the complexity and constantly changing dynamics of the global security environment, as well as the EU's role and capacity to effectively respond to crises. Despite challenges like coordinating diverse member states' interests and limited resources, the Treaty of Lisbon and developments several robust institutions and mechanisms for crisis management like the EEAS and CSDP have significantly strengthened the EU's capabilities, aiming to balance internal initiatives with external alliances like NATO for effective crisis response. Looking forward, the EU aims to adapt to global dynamics, emphasizing the development of its capabilities, technology integration, and international cooperation to remain effective in managing crises.

The conclusions on dialectical developments in EU crisis management reflect the continuous interactions between opposing forces and contradictory ideas that have shaped EU policies and practices in this area, these developments illustrating how the EU has adapted and responded to emerging challenges in an international environment complex and changing. Despite global trends towards unilateralism and nationalism, the EU has remained committed to promoting multilateralism, also developing the ability to act independently when the situation calls for it. The EU has sought to maintain a balance between the need for adaptability and the need for strategic coherence, involving adaptation to specific crises while maintaining common long-term directions and objectives.

The EU's crisis management strategy reflects a dynamic process, balancing between diverse national interests and the collective European goal of effective crisis response. This approach involves integrating both civilian and military capabilities, promoting multilateralism while also developing the capacity for independent action. The EU strives for strategic coherence alongside adaptability to address specific crises, showcasing a commitment to synthesize various approaches within a complex, changing international environment.

In conclusion, the EU's crisis management strategy is an ongoing evolution, aimed at adapting to global security shifts and emerging threats. The focus on enhancing both civilian and military capabilities, promoting a rules-based international order, and fostering cooperation is crucial for its effectiveness. Despite all the criticisms and challenges, the EU's commitment to agility, cohesion, transparency, and adaptability is vital in addressing complex challenges in a changing geopolitical landscape, ensuring it remains a key actor in international crisis management.

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THE EU'S ROLE IN THE TRANSNISTRIA CONFLICT SETTLEMENT

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Abstract: *The end of the Cold War allowed many Eastern European countries to claim their right to self-determination. This event has created challenges to these states' sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Republic of Moldova was one of them, whose integrity was challenged by a separatist entity supported by the Russian Federation, which ended in a frozen conflict. In the struggle for reintegration, Moldova asked the international community for support, mainly the European Union and NATO, whose values are close to its way of development.*

Keywords: *EU; Transnistria; security; Russia; economy, soft balancing.*

The end of the Cold War added a new page in Europe's history. The collapse of the former Warsaw Pact raised new opportunities for the European Union (EU) and former Soviet countries allowing increasing cooperation in the security and economic fields, consequently augmenting the population's well-being. In this context, many countries tried to improve their financial situation by adhering to the European family (Olsen 2021). The European integration process brought the Republic of Moldova, a former Soviet country with a frozen conflict on its territory, to the outskirts of the EU. This situation forced EU members to take a stance in conflict resolution to stabilize the region and possibly integrate Transnistria into its common market.

The paper will argue that the EU/NATO soft approach to conflict resolution through a soft balancing approach played a vital role in the future integration of the region despite its few movements toward conflict settlement. First, the EU has the same agenda as the Republic of Moldova: a peaceful solution to the conflict. Second, the recent developments in the Ukrainian conflict impacted the Transnistria business environment and, consequently, its economy, forcing businesses to look for new markets.

With the agreement on ceasefire in 1992, the conflict resolution format changed. Set as five parties with Russia in the lead, it did not match the goals settled in the beginning as Russia and Ukraine were periodically impartial during meetings, supporting Transnistria (Cantir Cristian, Kennedy Ryan 2015). However, the NATO "open door" policy brought new opportunities for the former Warsaw Pact and ex-Soviet states as they could join its security umbrella and increase their defense capabilities (Hendrickson 2000). Republic of Moldova could not join as it did not match the requirements. Yet, the situation changed as the EU and NATO enlargement brought the conflict to its borders. The 2005 "Odessa Protocol" changed the existing "3+2" format to the current "5+2" format, adding the United States and the EU as observers (OSCE 2005). As the former minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Moldova pointed out in one of his articles, enlargement brought new opportunities to the EU, strengthening its capability by encompassing "new states with a greater knowledge of these conflicts" and "which can strengthen the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) to seek the settlement of these conflicts" (Popescu 2006). Moreover, NATO officials emphasized such an opportunity. Javier Solana maintained that the EU was "the only regional organization with a wide range of political, diplomatic, humanitarian, economic and financial, police and military instruments" (Solana 2004).

However, in the EU enlargement and its attempt to tackle conflict in Transnistria, Russia saw it as a competition for influence in the region, with Moldova as the centerpiece (Kennedy 2016). In this situation, some scholars saw the Republic of Moldova as "a second front in a struggle between the EU and Russia," a region that "balanced on a knife's edge between a future as an

impoverished, militarized Russian colony or as a beneficiary of EU integration and European values” (Orenstein and Mizsei 2014). Consequently, the EU has no solution but an integrated approach to conflict resolution because, besides economic and political influence, “it also needs to be able to guarantee stability, prevent conflicts and manage crises on its doorstep” (Commission 2004). Moreover, the way the West needed to intervene was seen as a process dictated by some aspects: “the raw size and military strength of the targeted state; whether there are any competing issues on the Western foreign policy agendas relating to this state/region; and whether there is another alternative (regional) power that provides political, economic, or military support” (Levitsky and Way 2006).

However, Western intervention in the region was soft, mainly emphasized by political and economic involvement. The EU and NATO strategy was understood as focused to reduce Russian influence in the area by affecting the conflict settlement seducing parties as a structural realist of soft balancing approach (Kennedy 2016) because of the US calculations on China as the biggest competitor (He and Feng 2008). In his view, the realist concept of the soft balancing approach tackled by the West had little success as it neither solved the conflict nor restrained the Russian influence.

The limited success of the Western strategy was due to Transnistria's security and economic dependence on Russia. This support increased after the 2003 Kozak Memorandum failure, a Russian effort to reintegrate the region, giving Transnistria a special status and maintaining its military presence (Rogstad 2016). In the EU's and US's perceptions, such an agreement would permit Transnistria (consequently Russia) to block any uncomfortable administration in Chişinău by vetoing critical decisions. Moreover, it will leave Russian forces stationary in Transnistria. So, it contravened Western interest in the area and downgraded its soft effort over the conflict. Consequently, the EU and the US through their diplomatic representatives intervened to support Moldovan government to cope with Russian pressure (Hill 2012).

Dembińska argued that Russian support became vital for Transnistria's survival as the EU effort to consolidate the control in the area deployed EUBAM (European Border Assistance to Moldova and Ukraine) that stopped smuggling and regulated the exports and transit of goods to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) market (Dembinska and Mérand 2019). The customs agreements between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, signed in March 2006, boosted the EUBAM effort. As a result, it highlighted that the remittances from workers abroad and Russian economic assistance “in the form of gas and humanitarian aid” represented the foremost contributors to the Transnistria economy (Caşus 2013). Soft balancing brought slight improvement to conflict resolution and did not change the preferences of Transnistria elites in the initial stage, considering the massive dependency on Russian political and economic support (Beyer and Wolff 2016).

However, the Ukrainian conflict draws a new line in Transnistria's strategy. Dembińska argued that local business constitutes substantial leverage over the political elite, which could influence the situation toward conflict resolution. She argued that a dual reliance on external resources for economic survival played a central role in maintaining the status quo. She claims that the geopolitical shift in the region pushed Transnistria to balance Russian Federation financial support and Western market facilitation (Dembinska and Mérand 2019).

The same argument introduced by Ryan Kennedy sustained that the Western approach to conflict resolution through soft balancing diverged local businesses into two sides that facilitated a Western integration of those companies (Kennedy 2016). Even though both methods did not resolve the conflict, they moved it to the right side. The premise of integrating regions without escalating the situation became more realistic than it was before, mainly due to synergistic interaction between market interests. Republic of Moldova's economic statecraft eased Russian Federation pressure.

The Eastern Partnership significantly enlarged and extended the scope of cooperation, emphasized particularly by the Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) signed in June 2014. Moreover, the population received with happiness the offer of a visa-free regime, which opened a new perspective for rights and the left bank of the Nistru River population. The Republic of Moldova thus arose as an example for others in the EU integration process.

The visa-liberalization process illustrates that the Republic of Moldova was the principal partner, "meeting all EU benchmarks and having Schengen visas lifted for its citizens" (Delcour 2021).

Diplomatic reality emphasized a significant change as the EU and NATO viewed Moldova as more critical to their foreign policy, a situation different from the '90s. The acknowledgment "as one of the EU's most reliable partners in the Eastern Partnership and by signing the AA and DCFTA" represented an essential change in the EU assessment about Republic of Moldova (Soloviev 2014). Such perception showed the commitment of the West not to accept any more Russian exclusive dominance in the area. Moreover, it will not tolerate a Russian military intervention in support of Transnistria without severe consequences (Kennedy 2016).

Moreover, Russia's invasion of Ukraine emphasized that the EU's support for the Republic of Moldova to handle frontier problems played a crucial role. With an increasing number of refugees, Moldovan authorities were overburden with potential intensification of smuggling and illegal human traffic while monitoring a border with an active war zone. In this context, Moldovan border management authorities were assisted to regulate the influx of refugees. Frontex mission allowed information exchange, training, and coordination of certain joint operational measures (Frontex 2023). Such support increased the Republic of Moldova's border control capability.

June 2022 marked a special event for the Republic of Moldova as EU leaders granted EU candidacy. Such an occurrence propelled the Republic of Moldova toward a new stage in the European integration process and strongly indicated support to strengthen its security. Concurrently, the EU decided on a financial assistance aiming to boost the Republic of Moldova's affected economy, mainly focused on easing energy and gas dependency on Russia.

Furthermore, in December 2023, the Republic of Moldova opened accession negotiations that increased the Republic of Moldova's position in the process of Transnistria conflict regulation. Such a change in geopolitical landscape allowed the Republic of Moldova to change the discussion format to "1+1" and apply the same taxation rules for business located on the left bank of the Nistru River. Moreover, the EU allocated €13 million in humanitarian assistance for Republic of Moldova to ease neighboring conflict effects on the Moldovan economy (EU 2023).

Additionally, in April 2023, the EU took more steps toward increasing the Republic of Moldova security, launching a civilian mission in Moldova (EUPM Moldova) under the Common Security and Defense Policy. The main task of the mission is "to enhance the resilience of the security sector of the country in the areas of crisis management and hybrid threats, including cyber security" (EU 2023). Such commitment will help the Republic of Moldova to cope with an increasing Russian effort to intensify internal societal fragmentation.

To conclude, Western low interest in the Republic of Moldova during the '90s allowed Russia to strengthen its position as a regional leader. Using Transnistria conflict as lever Russia kept Republic of Moldova in its area of influence. There were fewer tools for Moldovan government to cope with Russia political and economic pressure as its economy was linked with CSI market and Western interest was low as Russia was perceived as following a democratic path of development.

However, the EU and NATO "open door" policy in the early 2000s created new opportunities for the Republic of Moldova (Hendrickson 2000). Using political leverage, the Republic of Moldova could change the format of discussions over the conflict by adding Western support. Having an exclusive economic interest in the region, the EU conducted a soft policy that boosted the economy of the Republic of Moldova. It created leverage over Transnistria through the EUBAM mission, increasing custom control of the goods traded with the CIS market and diminishing the smuggling effect. Moreover, the customs agreement between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine gave leverage and reduced Russian direct support for Transnistria. Even though it did not solve the conflict, it created new ground for its peaceful settlement.

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WEAPONIZATION OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA NARRATIVES IN HUNGARY, RUSSIA AND TURKIYE, AND THEIR POTENTIAL IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract: *In this paper we point out the significant impact that historical trauma narratives may have on the current international security environment, especially in our area. To this end, we will analyze the impact of historical trauma narratives spread by the elites and governments of Hungary, Russia and Turkiye, which are meant to justify and fuel policies, attitudes and strategies that have a potential negative impact on regional security. This exact same type of narrative has fuelled the justification for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and are also fuelling aggressive and revisionist foreign policies from Ankara and Budapest, creating a climate of tension and security risks in our region. While there are definitely various real historical traumas and suffering that need to be properly addressed and reconciled with throughout the world, there are also cynical weaponizations of these traumas, manipulated by politicians and academics alike, for personal, political, and geopolitical benefits.*

Keywords: *historical trauma; narratives; manipulation; Russia; Hungary; Turkiye.*

Introduction

In the beginning of our paper, we will discuss historical trauma from a theoretical perspective, and after that we will show the vast extent of historical trauma narratives and beliefs in Hungarian, Turkish and Russian societies. Afterwards, we will show how the elites of these countries have spread and are spreading, manipulating and benefiting from these historical trauma narratives inflicted upon their own societies, and how such processes pose a significant long-term threat on regional security. The war in Ukraine is just one such example.

A rather obvious observation is that today war can no longer be waged regardless of everybody else, as a strictly personal, arbitrary decision of a despot. Not even in the Russian Federation, not in Turkiye, the United States or China, probably not even in North Korea. Today, in the age of globalized mass media, in the age of digitization and instant worldwide news, public opinion and opinion polls, there is a need for narratives that prepare the public for war and violence, that make them acceptable if not desirable and, above all, that justify them for internal and external audiences. And no other narrative serves this purpose better than narratives of historical trauma, of real or perceived injustices of the past that purportedly demand action and resolution today, even if that means aggression against neighbours and war. This weaponization has a clear potential negative impact on wider international security, especially because of the long-term societal impact these narratives have in certain societies.

1. Which are the historical traumas for the analyzed societies?

In the Russian Federation, the historical trauma was decided to be the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, as it was stated from the highest level by Vladimir Putin in 2005 (NBC News 2005). In Hungary, the historical trauma is called the Trianon Trauma, and in Turkiye

the name of the historical trauma is The Sèvres Syndrome. All three traumas mourn the dismemberment of empires and aspire to rebuild them, one way or another, which implies serious security problems for the entire region, as the war in Ukraine is already showing it.

1.1. What is historical trauma and how does the concept relate to Hungary, Turkiye and Russia

One of the first researchers to investigate the notion of historical trauma as such was Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart. Starting in the 1980s, she published a number of papers on this issue which basically brought it into the academic and public consciousness. Another important researcher in the field of historical trauma is Michelle Sotero, with the work called *A Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma: Implications for Public Health Practice and Research*. The model of research and definition of historical trauma proposed by this researcher claims that “*historical trauma originates with the subjugation of a population by a dominant group. Successful subjugation requires at least four elements: (1) overwhelming physical and psychological violence, (2) segregation and/or displacement, (3) economic deprivation, and (4) cultural dispossession.*” (Sotero 2006, 99)

Michelle Sotero summarizes the theory of historical trauma in four distinct points: “*(1) mass trauma is deliberately and systematically inflicted upon a target population by a subjugating, dominant population; (2) trauma is not limited to a single catastrophic event, but continues over an extended period of time; (3) traumatic events reverberate throughout the population, creating a universal experience of trauma; and (4) the magnitude of the trauma experience derails the population from its natural, projected historical course resulting in a legacy of physical, psychological, social and economic disparities that persists across generations.*” (Sotero 2006, 94-95).

- However, applying these observations of Michelle Sotero on the Trianon Trauma, on the Sèvres Syndrome and on the trauma of the dissolution of the USSR, we can note that, as regarding point 1 mentioned above, it is more than arguable that someone, a dominant population from outside the borders (the “West” or “foreigners”, as some Hungarians, Turks or Russians would say), had a strategy and wanted to deliberately and systematically traumatize the Hungarian, Russian and Turkish populations (despite individual and rare unfair excesses of some military occupation forces in Hungary and Turkiye, inherent in any war, but non-existent in the case of the collapse of the USSR). On the contrary, it was their own dominant elites who wanted to traumatize their own populations and created narratives in this sense to preserve certain advantages in society and to hide mistakes, as we will show below.

- The second point made by Michelle Sotero, which states that “*(2) trauma is not limited to a single catastrophic event, but continues over an extended period of time*”, is also fully valid in the case of the Trianon Trauma, for the Sèvres Syndrome, and in the case of the Russian society (which can be said that it has been living from one trauma to another starting from the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War, the worst traumas being those inflicted by its own leaders). In the respective traumatic narratives from Hungary and Turkiye, there were included all the suffering and defeats of the First World War (many of which were common to the whole of Europe, including the Romanians and Slovaks, the French and the Germans – the death of loved ones, poverty, hunger, material and spiritual destruction, etc.), all the suffering that followed it, namely the economic crisis in Hungary and the traumatic, abrupt reform in Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's Turkiye. These emerging narratives also included the induction of a sense of collective national humiliation (which calls for revenge, doesn't it?) based on the loss the status of great empires, narratives skillfully led by their own elites and exploited by them.

But the main issue on this point is that, although the sufferings were spread over a longer period of time, they were not caused by the same events, by the same actors, and the trauma

itself was named after a political act (i.e., The Treaty of Trianon, the Treaty of Sèvres or the dissolution of the USSR), not after any massacres suffered by their own populations. Again, this is an indication of the intentional constructed nature of the narratives of these traumas, and not an indication of a natural development of the narrative construction of the traumas and their names, as they are, for example, for the Armenian Genocide, the Holodomor (Death by Starvation), the Holocaust (roughly translated as Burnt Sacrifice), the Genocide of Rwanda, the Khmer Rouge Genocide, The Potato Famine or The Great Famine (Irish Great Famine), The Stolen Generation in the case of the Australian Aborigines, even the Century of Humiliation for China and others. None of these, which are perhaps some of the world's best known historical traumas, were named after a peace treaty or the demise of an empire. However, in the case of the Russian Federation the historical trauma was determined to be the dissolution of the Soviet empire, and in the case of Hungary and Türkiye the trauma was built around the dissolution of their own empires and the peace treaties of Trianon and Sèvres (whose provisions were not even ultimately implemented).

- The third point made by Michelle Sotero states “(3) traumatic events reverberate throughout the population, creating a universal experience of trauma;”, which is again valid for Hungary, Türkiye or Russia. But it was the narratives of their own elites which made sure that Trianon and Sèvres would represent a traumatic culmination of the entire Hungarian and Turkish society, and the dissolution of the USSR because of the “West” embodied all the past, present or future sufferings and traumas of Russian society. We analyze further below.

1.2. The spread and effect of historical trauma narratives in Hungary

As explicit testimonies, there are two analyses by Hungarian researchers who even talk about a *traumatic national identity* in the case of Hungarians. A Hungarian ethnic from the USA, interviewed by one of the researchers, explicitly said that: “no discussion of Hungarian depression is complete without mentioning Trianon.” (Gombocz 2016, 26). The second Hungarian researcher highlights the construction of *traumatic identity*, and how the historical trauma of Trianon was and is being constructed within Hungarian children (Szőnyi 2017).

Further proof in this direction is our analysis of depression among the Hungarian population in Hungary or even in Romania, where we found out that, according to official statistical data of the National Institute of Legal Medicine “Mina Minovici”, the highest annual suicide rate in each of the last years reported (2017-2019) is in counties with a majority (Harghita, Covasna) or a large percentage (Satu Mare, Mureş) of Hungarian/Magyar population (INML 2017-2019). Another analysis shows the situation was the same also between 1999-2012 for these counties with a large proportion of Hungarian/Magyar ethnics, which ranked first in Romania regarding suicide rates (Rădulescu 2014, 9-10).

The fact that there is a link between depression, suicide and certain cultural causes for them among the ethnic Hungarian population (the narratives of the historical trauma of Trianon are cultural elements) is also supported by the Hungarian researcher Katarina Gombocz, who states that: “While the high suicide rate among Hungarians has dropped in the last few decades, it remains one of the highest in the European Union (Székely et al. 2013). Depression, which has been linked to suicide in Hungary, remains high as well (Szanto 2007). It is important to consider lay beliefs of causes of depression as well as historical and cultural contexts among Hungarians to add to the clinical knowledge if such a problem is to be remediated, particularly in the context of Hungarian immigrants and 2nd and 3rd generation Hungarians in the United States.” (Gombocz 2016, 74). She also states in the same paper that: “Depression and suicide rates have been and continue to be high in Hungary relative to other European countries. An investigation of cultural and social circumstances in Hungary that might exacerbate these rates needs to be undertaken to elucidate potential risk factors for these rates.” (Gombocz 2016, iv).

As regarding the expansion of these narratives about the Trianon Trauma in Hungary, we only give the example of a survey from the year 2020 (Trianon 100 MTA-Lendület 2020) which showed that 70-78% of the population believed that the Treaty of Trianon was a result of the geopolitical aspirations of the Great Powers and the expansionist ambitions of Hungary's neighbors, plus the defeat in World War I. 94% of the Hungarians being interviewed believed the Treaty of Trianon was fundamentally unjust and exaggerated for Hungarians, 85% believed Trianon was Hungary's biggest tragedy, and 77% believed that Hungary had not yet recovered from the Trianon Trauma.

Of course, this does not mean that all of those 70-90% of Hungarians interviewed above suffer from Trianon Trauma, but it does mean that they are very susceptible to its narratives and related manipulation. In this regard, Katarina Gombocz stresses in her research the need to investigate how ethnic identity and cultural aspects (like our Trianon narrative) have an impact on individual identity and mental health: "Research in the relationship between cultural contexts, especially ethnic identification and mental health, enriches the knowledge of the field and can further illuminate the ways in which ethnic identity interacts with depression." (Gombocz 2016, 4). The same researcher, starting from a definition of ethnicity by Milton Yinger, who considered ethnicity to be "a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients" (Milton Yinger apud Gombocz 2016, 10), comments on how some Hungarians come to share and adopt at a personal level the narratives, the "culture" and even the trauma and the depression of their common identity group: "The "common origin" refers in this thesis to Hungarian ancestry—whether participants are first- or second-generation or Hungarian immigrants—and their self-ascribed Hungarian identification, which per Yinger's definition is how they distinguish themselves from the people of the larger society in which they live. Interviews will elicit their shared "important segments of a common culture" (1976: 200), which includes also their shared family histories of depression as well as their Hungarian history with its traumatic events. Their "shared activities" (200) are the narrative processes by which they understand depression by making references to a common, traumatic past. The common origin of Hungarian ancestry and common culture of family history of depression and shared collective traumas are the "significant ingredients" (200) in the shared activity of narrative processes." (Gombocz 2016: 10-11)

The results of the above-mentioned poll were probably viewed as a real success by Viktor Orban's government, but it may very well be success built on the real suffering, caused from within, of its own citizens, with dramatic effects among them, as I have shown above, and with potential negative effects for the regional security environment.

1.3. The spread and effect of historical trauma narratives in Turkiye

According to surveys regarding the prevalence of Sèvres Syndrome narratives in Turkiye, some results were overwhelming. For example, 62.4% of Turks believed in 2022 that „*European countries are willing to divide and disintegrate Turkiye just like they did to the Ottoman Empire in the past*”, and we also have a very large percentage of Turks who still compare, 1,000 years on, the attitude of "the West" to the crusades (52.2% in 2022) (GMF 2022: 24). And many more such narratives are being overwhelmingly embraced by the Turkish society, for example 46.6% believed that "*The reforms demanded from Turkey by the EU are similar to the ones mentioned in the Sevres Treaty in the past*" (GMF 2022: 24).

The percentage of social distrust among members of one's own society is also overwhelming, in 2022 social distrust was close to 90% (Saleh 2023: 5). Thus, the spread of these Sèvres Syndrome narratives is very large in Turkish society, and with a particularly high potential for external insecurity.

1.4. The spread and effect of historical trauma narratives in Russia

We can learn about the construction of traumatic narratives in the Russian Federation, and about the manipulation of history, from Cupcea's volume *"Professor Putin". Identity Politics and Curriculum in Post-Soviet Russia*. The reconstruction of the narratives regarding the history of Russia was started by Vladimir Putin in 2001 with a decree called *"Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation in 2001-2005"* (Cupcea 2023: 82).

So, when the same Vladimir Putin talks about history in 2005, and he states that the dismantling of the USSR empire *"was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century"* and *"for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy"* (NBC News 2005), then things are very obvious for most of the Russian society about where they have to look for reasons for their suffering, trauma, frustration or poverty.

So, on that note, in a 2020 multiple choice poll (Levada-Center 2021, 29) indicating events with both negative and positive connotations for Russian citizens, when asked which event of the 20th century they would consider the most significant for their country, 37% of Russians interviewed believed that this was the collapse of the USSR. This was the most important *negative* event of the 20th century for them (far more important than other negative events like the collectivization, the Civil War or the Stalinist Repression in the 1930s), and it was outranked in answers by only 2 *positive* events in the opinion of the respondents, that is, the "Great Patriotic War" which ended in victory for USSR and the flight of Yuri Gagarin into space, another important victory. Highlighting the negative connotation of the fall of USSR for Russian citizens, in the same survey, when asked which event in Russian history of the 20th century would make them feel *ashamed or sad*, most answered that it was *"the destruction of the USSR"*, with 49% (Levada-Center 2021: 31). It is clear, then, that the largest percentage of Russians resonates with the establishment of historical "trauma" in the "destruction of the USSR", as leader Vladimir Putin indicated they should. Other traumas, such as repression, terror, persecution of the church, deportations of entire populations, ranked much lower at this perception of *shame and sadness* in Russia.

The percentage of Russians who declare themselves ashamed of dramatic episodes in their history is constantly decreasing, as a result of the official narratives transposed in school curricula and in propaganda, especially through films - 34% were ashamed in 1999 of the purges and forced deportations of 1920-1950, but in less than 20 years the percentage had dropped to 21%, and the communist persecution of the Orthodox Church made only 16% of Russians feel ashamed (Cupcea 2023: 126). As regarding education and history in Russia, the author notices that *"Heroes are constantly resurrected, myths just the same, Stalin is almost rehabilitated, Yeltsin and Gorbachev almost forgotten, deportations and repressions are rarely mentioned, conflicts with neighbors are supported in the name of Russia, and Vladimir Putin is considered the savior of the nation."* (Cupcea 2023: 151) Stalinist traumas, civil war and Bolshevik massacres, deportations, purges, repressions are all deliberately forgotten by official narratives, as an analysis by a Russian journalist, Mikhail Zygar, explicitly testifies (Van der Jan 2017). In the Russian society, room is made only for the official version of *"the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century"*, the dissolution of the USSR.

However, there are still some Russian citizens who have sought to find out the true traumas within, and found it in the horrific communist repressions and gulags. They named such a documentary in a highly symbolic manner, *Kolyma – Birthplace of Our Fear* (Dud 2019). This is a must watch documentary for anyone who wants to understand certain reflexes in Russian society. Needless to say, the author of that documentary was heavily criticized in the Russian Federation, which is in full process of rehabilitating Stalin.

- As regarding point number 4 noticed by Michelle Sotero, which is that *"(4) the magnitude of the trauma experience derails the population from its natural, projected historical*

course resulting in a legacy of physical, psychological, social and economic disparities that persists across generations”, this is true in its first part only in the sense in which the trajectory of the population was diverted by the fact that three empires ended, and in these empires the Russian, Hungarian and Turkish nations had had a dominant role, and the narratives of their own elites do not let the societies get over this political fact.

Otherwise, from an economic point of view, the society in Hungary is very prosperous, the one in Turkiye is also in a fulminant development, and the one in the Russian Federation also experiences a relative increase in well-being. Actually, according to the Human Development Index (UNDP 2021), they are all doing much better than in 1990, and, for comparison, even slightly better than Romania. Anyway, in none of the respective three societies can we speak of any economical subjugation by someone from abroad. So, there is no question of physical, psychological, economic or social disparities due to foreign forces in these three societies which, on the contrary, were dominant in the broken empires and often still behave with a complex of imperial superiority towards their neighbors.

However, from another point of view, regarding the second part of the statement of point 4 from above, it is correct in relation to our current research from a psychological point of view, meaning that trauma narratives do have repercussions on the physical state of health of individuals, especially for Hungarians, because of their *traumatic national identity*, as it was called by Hungarian researchers. I have shown above the overwhelming impact of the narratives of own elites in Hungarian and Turkish societies - unfortunately, fear, depression, even suicide, mistrust, the sense of loss, self-victimization present in huge percentages leave traces in the psychological, physical and societal relations in Hungary and Turkiye.

1.5. We have the symptoms of historical traumas, but not the triggering causes

So, here too we have the symptoms of historical traumas clearly present, but, again we emphasize, these are produced by the narratives of their own elites much more than massacres, genocides, discriminations or persecution suffered by the members of the respective communities on behalf of other dominant communities. In support of these statements comes another paragraph by Michelle Sotero, who states about the dominant group that traumatizes another society that it *„enforces subjugation through various means including military force, bio-warfare, national policies of genocide, ethnic cleansing, incarceration, enslavement, and/or laws that prohibit freedom of movement, economic development, and cultural expression.”* (Sotero 2006: 99) But it cannot be stated under any circumstances that any dominant group subjugated the Hungarian, Turkish or Russian population in the case of the historical traumas invoked by their elites. We cannot speak of genocide against them, or ethnic cleansing (although the mutual massacres during the Greco-Turkish wars did come close to this, but they were mutual matters and later mutual exchanges of populations), no one inflicted ethnic cleansing against the Hungarians after Trianon or against the Russians after the dissolution of the USSR. We cannot talk about mass incarcerations, slavery, prohibition of freedom of movement or of economic or cultural development (although this aspect, interestingly enough, is one of Vladimir Putin's favorite narratives by which he wants to justify the invasion of Ukraine).

So, as clearly as possible, we have shown how we encounter symptoms of the historical trauma that the societies of Hungary, Turkiye or the Russian Federation are experiencing, but for which their own elites and the narratives and policies implemented by them are responsible more than concrete historical events which would have caused them.

2. The weaponization and construction of historical trauma narratives by their own elites in Hungary, Turkiye, and the Russian Federation

Viktor Orban, in his “*State of The Nation*” speech in 2020, when Hungary commemorated 100 years from the Treaty of Trianon, explicitly stated that: “*Not only did this diktat (n.r. The Treaty of Trianon) end the First World War, it also ended the era of Hungarian history leading up to it. (...) The verdict was obviously a death sentence. History has not recorded a nation that could survive such a loss of blood.*”, and then he cites Count Apponyi, a xenophobe and somewhat racist member of the Hungarian elite of 1920, who “*was right to say that Hungary’s grave had been dug. The loss was devastating in itself, but even more traumatic – if that were possible – was the fact that state formations such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were being constructed around us.*” (About Hungary 2020) We must notice the keywords that were used in this communication: “*traumatic*”, but also “*ended*”, “*death sentence*”, “*grave*”, and “*devastating*”. The same has been done by Recep Erdogan in Turkiye on numerous occasions when he talked about Lausanne or Sèvres (Tharoor 2020) (Republic of Turkiye 2016), the same has been done by Vladimir Putin when he talked about the dissolution or the “*destruction*” of the USSR, as we showed earlier. How could an ordinary citizen ignore such powerful messages to the nation coming from the highest level? It is almost impossible, which is exactly why the manipulation of historical trauma and related suffering is so powerful when it occurs, and this is exactly why the majority of the said societies is engulfed by beliefs deriving from these narratives.

2.1. Hungary

Éva Kovács, a Hungarian researcher, writes about the weaponization of the Trianon Trauma starting from the very first days after 1920, after the Treaty of Trianon: “*The old-new Hungarian political elite, by receiving state sovereignty, could have tried to reintegrate post-war society by democratic and inclusive politics –but it did not happen that way. The Trianon myth temporarily helped to restore the pre-war power structure, and to stabilize the shattered social order, at least within the upper and middle classes.*” (Kovács 2016: 530) So, this is how the construction of the Trianon Trauma narrative was a political decision of the “*old-new*” Hungarian elites, i.e. the same ones who could have chosen to build the Hungarian society after the First World War differently. But they chose not to.

Éva Kovács goes on to show what role the Trianon narrative played in the vision of post-war Hungarian elites: “*To sum up, the complex made up of all pains, wounds and mourning of First World War was sublimated and therefore minimised and repressed with the help of the Trianon metaphor.*” (Kovács 2016: 531)

Another Hungarian researcher, just as well, plainly states that: “*Balogh further argues that this conservation (n.r. of the feeling of loss and grievance generated by Trianon) was based on the duality that those in control of the discourse were (and still are) not the affected Hungarian minorities across the border but the the politicians of the ‘small’ Hungary, whose interest is not necessarily to resolve the social conflicts and strong emotional reactions but the instrumentalization of those emotions for their political goals.*” (Szönyi 2017: 22)

In other words, the main goals of the Trianon Trauma narratives were from the beginning the preservation of the own status, and the power of the Hungarian elites from before the First World War, but also to hide their own mistakes, to shift attention from the suffering and the wounds of the

First World War in a metaphor of the Trauma of Trianon and in revisionism. It was much more convenient to spread narratives according to which only the “foreigners”, “Westerners”, “Romanians”, etc., were responsible for everything, and not their own elites, who were so responsible for the outbreak of the First World War in the first place, as well as for the deeply oppressive treatment applied to minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the outbreak of the war.

2.2. Turkiye

In Turkiye, about the manipulation and weaponization of societal fears associated with Sèvres Syndrome, Dorothee Schmid, a researcher of the phenomenon, states that: „*The exploitation of the syndrome for tactical purposes has become so commonplace a practice in Turkiye that it can be talked about as a political tradition.*” (Schmid 2015: 16)

Concerning the use of the fear inflicted by trauma, for internal and external self-interests, for the consolidation of power, just like in Hungary and the Russian Federation, another author states that: „*This «fear was fixed» thanks to the continuous presentation by the Turkish military-political authorities which was giving an opportunity to keep the threat of dismemberment and elimination of the Turkish state viable, with it making the social consciousness more oriented, ensure necessary consolidation. With it, it was becoming easier to ensure the public orientation in the necessary inner-political and foreign political processes through the formation of collective character of external enemy.*” (Hovsepyan 2012: 66)

In a previous research, we identified *fear, invasion by foreigners, betrayal by Christian minorities, and betrayal by Ottoman elites* as the main characteristics for the manifestation of Sèvres Syndrome narratives in Turkish society. (Blănaru 2023b: 118)

The way trauma is transmitted is similar to that in Hungary and the Russian Federation: through educational policies, through religious discourse, through political discourse, and through pseudo-academic and pseudo-scientific products. (Blănaru 2023b: 129) In addition, the Kemalist elites, at first, later the neo-Ottoman ones, adjusted the trauma narratives to better serve their purposes. For example, we showed in our research mentioned earlier how in the beginning the narratives and behaviors of the so-called Sèvres Syndrome had almost nothing anti-Western about them (Blănaru 2023b: 121-23). Even during the English occupation of parts of the former Ottoman Empire, the behavior of the Ottoman population was entirely devoid of anti-Westernism. Over time, things changed dramatically, to the striking anti-Westernism of today in much of Turkish society, a direct result of the narratives disseminated by their own elites, of which the most vocal and energetic anti-Western discourse comes from none other than president Erdogan.

2.3. Russia

About the manipulation and weaponization of history in the Russian Federation, which intricately concerns historical traumas, a Russian historian, Nikita Sokolov, explicitly stated that Russian history was commonly used for two purposes: first, to justify the repressive policy of the elites, and secondly as a fight against civic activism (Cupcea 2023: 157). Civic activism that could have threatened the authority of the same elites in power. We add a third goal, perhaps the most important for the present analysis which focuses on security threats, namely revisionism and the justification for external aggression and the invasion of neighbors, such as the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.

Regarding the manipulation and the purposes of history in Russia, James C. Pearce, who wrote a volume specifically on the issue of the “use” of history in Russia, argued that:

“Istoricheskaya politika can be a reliable legitimization force because it is malleable to suit the state’s interests and play on the emotions of the population.” (Pearce 2021: 69), which is exactly what we have been arguing about the manipulation of historical trauma, the most sensitive of all historical issues. The same author says that *“the Russian state uses its history for the purpose of state consolidation, modernization and reviving Russia’s national consciousness”* (Pearce 2021: xiii). What we have to understand here is that *“state consolidation”* in Russia means consolidation of power for Vladimir Putin (*“State power is symbolic to the idea of ‘Russia’ (...); Putin is its current face.”* (Pearce 2021: 41)), and for the elite faithful to him, and *“reviving Russia’s national consciousness”* means reviving *Imperial Russia’s* consciousness, just as Vladimir Putin’s arguments that deny the statehood of Ukraine have been proving. This underlines again what we stated earlier, that the main reasons behind manipulation of history and trauma in Russia are *consolidation of power for the elites* and *revisionism or imperialism*.

Therefore, we have the same two main goals found in the Russian Federation, in Hungary or Turkiye behind the manipulation of history and of the traumatic narratives concerning their own populations: on the interior, it is safeguarding the power and status of their own elites, and on the exterior it is pursuing the aggressive and revisionist ideology of the imperialist type, which is a real threat for the whole region.

3. Consequences in terms of regional security due to narratives of historical trauma

It is dramatic what we have shown above, but these are the results of the implementation of traumatic narratives by their own elites in Hungary, Turkiye and the Russian Federation, with a potentially high negative impact on regional security.

And this is no longer just about some populist or revisionist statements made by Viktor Orban, it is no longer just about some neo-Ottomanist statements from Recep Erdogan or imperialist statements from Vladimir Putin, this is about *three whole societies where the impact of these narratives is quite high*, as the surveys above have shown. In Hungary, we have a whole traumatic national identity and self-victimization built around Trianon, with revisionist accents. In Turkiye, we have more than half of the population who still believe in the actuality of the Crusades, and even more who believe that the Europeans want to dismember Turkiye as they must have done with the Ottoman Empire, in a defensive-aggressive way, with revisionist accents there, too. In Russia, the official trauma is designated the collapse of the USSR, for which the Westerners are also to blame, Stalin is rehabilitated, and Ukraine, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and even the Baltic States are considered part of the Russian world, whether they want it or not, of course, in a revisionist manner.

All of the above is what the respective populations mostly believe about us Europeans, and they will continue to believe these things for a long time to come. The elites of these societies ensured this through education, through propaganda, through symbolism, through partisan so-called “academic” research, through statements, through the establishment of so-called institutions and magazines purportedly “academic”, through the establishment of memorial days, special classes for students, museums dedicated to these traumas (Szónyi 2017: 17-21), in short, by building whole narratives, which we analyze here.

This is the greatest danger to the regional security and even to Romania, not the statements of some political leaders *per se*, whomever they are. Their statements are only part of the puzzle, they are only part of the narrative that has engulfed these societies, they are only the tip of the iceberg. And an additional problem with these narratives is that, in certain internal and external conditions, which can even be stimulated by their own leaders, they can explode, they can encompass violently the whole society.

Of course, in addition to these societal aspects, which we consider the greatest danger to regional security in the medium and long term, and complementary to them, we have several concrete processes that are underway in our region.

In this regard, we notice the narrative preparation of the Russian Federation that materialized in the outbreak of the concrete war in Ukraine. This is the most abrupt proof of narrative preparations, and the use of historical trauma narratives in order to justify an invasion in Ukraine, the most concrete of threats.

We also notice the narrative preparation of Turkiye that materialized in its armed interventions in Syria, Libya, Iraq, for the aid given to terrorist organizations like Hamas, ISIS, al-Qaeda, threats made against the sovereignty of Greece (Stamouli 2022), Syria, Iraq, or against Armenia in the province of Zangezur (Syunik), together with Azerbaijan (Kucera 2021). We notice the realization of a new aggressive doctrine, the *Blue Homeland*, we notice the continuous and rapid militarization of Turkiye (Blănaru 2023a), we notice the nuclear, expansionist ambitions, on which we did a more extensive research in a recent collective volume we co-edited, *Turkiye at the Centenary. Quo Vadis? Geopolitics, economy, internal and external challenges*. Admiral Cem Gürdeniz, initiator of the *Blue Homeland* doctrine, explicitly stated what Turkiye will do, at the same time making use of the recurrent narrative of the collective blame on the “West”: “*Turkiye is in the process of being excluded from the Mediterranean Sea by Greece, with the help of Western countries, and no Turkish government, whichever it might be, will be able to accept that.*” (Arefi 2020) And we notice intensive hinterland building in Central Asia and the Balkans and expanding military bases abroad.

On the other hand, we notice Hungary's very energetic narrative preparations aimed at different types of concrete aggression against the sovereignty of its neighbors, out of which stand out the attitudes, the statements - for example, Viktor Orban's unacceptable statement that he has not recognized Transylvania as being a part of Romania (Costea and Kiss 2023), provocative photos or videos posted by the president of Hungary in Romania (Onea 2023), etc. -, and the programmes concerning Romania - for example, monopolizing the Hungarian-language media in Romania by pro-government entities from Budapest (Sipos 2021), or breaching the sovereignty of Romania by the Kos Karoly program (Dungaciu 2020) -, or a statement about ports allegedly “stolen” from Hungary, which angered Croatia (Radosavljevic 2022), statements and attitudes regarding Ukraine, Slovakia or even Slovenia, drawing a negative reaction from the President of Slovenia (STA 2020).

Another example, we see China's narrative preparations targeting Taiwan, preparing internal and external public opinion for whatever will happen there, preparing and inoculating *a priori* justification by using China's historical trauma from the *Century of Humiliation*.

All these leaders are telling us explicitly what they want to do. Narratives of historical trauma are used in all these societies as justification for revisionist actions and undoubtedly have an acute negative impact on international security and stability. Self-victimization from Hungary, Turkiye or the Russian Federation seeks to justify *a priori*, for internal and external

public opinion, a potential aggression on their part against their neighbors. Such aggression has already militarily begun from the Russian Federation in Ukraine, it has already begun from Turkiye in Syria and Iraq, even in the Eastern Mediterranean, in various forms.

4. Long-term impact on regional security

These narratives of historical trauma will have a long-lasting impact on security. First, all the leaders now directly responsible for implementing these narratives of historical trauma in Hungary, Turkiye, and the Russia, namely Viktor Orban, Recep Erdogan, and Vladimir Putin, do not seem to have any real domestic problems that could obstruct the implementation of these narratives both in their society, and internationally, in the short or medium term.

Secondly, these narratives are already very well implemented in society, which adheres to them, as we have showed above in point 2.1., and as evidenced by the fact that in the recent elections Viktor Orban, and Recep Erdogan, and their parties won the elections in which they were involved. Not to mention the fact that Turkiye's main opposition party, the Kemalist CHP, has a very similar ideology to Recep Erdogan regarding "foreigners" or "Westerners" or "Armenians", etc. This party, CHP, has been the main responsible for managing and transmitting the historical trauma of Sèvres Syndrome for many years, until around year 2,000, when AKP, Erdogan's party, took it over. At the same time, the war in Ukraine, despite the huge costs on multiple dimensions, doesn't seem to be domestically causing any particular problems for Vladimir Putin.

All the policies, narratives, propaganda, textbooks and school curriculum overseen by Viktor Orban, Recep Erdogan and Vladimir Putin have ensured that the historical trauma narratives that they want are well disseminated at home, which will have a long-term impact on their respective societies and, implicitly, on regional security, because of their vindictive, self-victimizing and imperialist content. And these preparatory narratives try to make war or aggression seem justifiable for internal and external public opinion (for example, like Hamas and far-left groups are doing right now), or, if possible, even make it seem that there is no other choice. Herein lies the huge importance of narrative for contemporary war or terrorism.

Conclusions

No matter how populist and apparently unrealistic, apparently ridiculous, some speeches coming from individuals like Viktor Orban, Recep Erdogan, Vladimir Putin are, they still do tell us explicitly what they are going to do from now on. Some could argue that maybe we do not want to see it, because the emerging reality does not correspond to the imagined one. Even though a definitive analysis which would assert the exact probability of these actions would require more parameters, we have to consider that these might be quite real geopolitical projections of these leaders.

In the end, we stress the main three ideas presented in our paper: 1. the societies in Hungary, Turkiye and the Russian Federation are being engulfed by beliefs induced by historical trauma narratives; 2. these historical trauma narratives have been purposefully constructed by their own elites over time; 3. we have to take into account the possibility that their elites might do at some point exactly what they have been telling us that they would, which is impact the current security environment in our area, and attempt to change borders and the internationally recognized order by any means. And their narratives, especially on historical trauma, have been making sure that their own societies would back them up.

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A MIRROR ANALYSIS OF ANTI-SEMITISM VERSUS RADICALIZATION: CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS AND GENERATED RISKS

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Abstract: *The outbreak of the Gaza conflict and the Israel-Hamas war demonstrated that a regional crisis can psychologically and socially impact society at an international level, noting the increase in anti-Semitic perceptions as well as the anticipation of a new trend of radicalization inspired by the Hamas ideology, directed against Israeli or Jewish objectives. These phenomena, as a result of technological dynamics and the digital role, can impact and distort the perception of individuals regardless of the region they belong to, generating high risks regarding the preservation of democratic values and principles and social order. In this sense, this article aims to extract the conceptual elements characteristic of the two phenomena in order to develop a comparative analysis that reflects in the mirror similarities and differences regarding their manifestation. Thus, the purpose of the paper is to raise society's awareness of the risks generated by the typology of these manifestations as well as facilitate the identification of early warning signals in relation to the upward trend generated at the international level.*

Keywords: *radicalization; mirror analysis; anti-Semitic views; radicalization trends; Gaza conflict context.*

Raising awareness in the context of the Gaza conflict crisis

The conflict in Gaza, which erupted after the declaration of war by Israel against Hamas following the unprecedented terrorist attack of October 26, 2023, produced a significant impact on collective perceptions at the international level, representing a new decisive turning point for the reconfiguration of the security architecture (Abbas, 2023). However, this turning point involves challenges related to the need to increase societal resilience, even in states that are apparently not directly affected by the consequences of this crisis, for example, Romania. However, it should be emphasized that the explosion of anti-Semitic narratives and international reactions regarding the legitimacy of the intervention in Gaza bring back into discussion sensitive subjects, strongly anchored in the historical and cultural context, but which, at the same time, generate risks regarding the preservation of democratic values in European countries. Therefore, the need to clarify some elements that particularize phenomena such as anti-Semitism and radicalization remains imperative, both in terms of updating the state of knowledge and also regarding the clarification of some niche aspects, the understanding of which leads to the consolidation of societal resilience and the increase of society's awareness.

Moreover, by reviewing the state of the art regarding radicalization, it is observed that challenges exist following the attempt to define the phenomenon or to build an applicable pattern regarding the causes and factors that influence the manifestation. Equally, anti-Semitism benefits from an often vague definition that can generate confusion, as well as serious gaps regarding the approach to this subject in specialized literature (Waxman *et al*, 2022). It is also useful to contextualize the cultural factors of the phenomena in order to avoid stereotyping certain social

categories or hyperbolizing the role of a single disciplinary dimension in explaining the phenomena (psychological, sociological, economic, and cultural). At the same time, another sensitive aspect in the conceptualization of phenomena consists in the tendency to focus on a single level of factors—micro or macro—related to the methodology applied, which is why the disconnection of these manifestations can create confusion: either by embracing a perspective centered on the interference of micro indicators, so as a consequence, an approach centered on the individual, leading to the impossibility of building a unitary vision, or, on the other hand, the generalization of the subject by hyperbolizing the macro factors, leading to the impossibility of covering a varied range of prototypes situational. Thus, in order to quantify the research objectives of the paper, the comparative analysis will focus on obtaining answers to two research questions: What are the conceptual elements that particularize anti-Semitism, respectively radicalization? What are the risks that can impact society following the manifestation of these two phenomena?

So, the usefulness of this research lies in clarifying some conceptual elements that particularize both phenomena and, at the same time, in covering some existing gaps in the knowledge stage. Equally, the analysis is relevant in the international security context, taking into account the explosion of anti-Semitism and cases of radicalization at the international level (IANS, 2023), determined by the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza following the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel (Dekel, 2023). As a consequence, the purpose of this paper is, following the comparative analysis between the two phenomena, to increase the degree of awareness and understanding of society regarding their manifestation and, as a consequence, to produce a favorable impact in the sense of facilitating the identification of alarm signals against the backdrop of the current amplification of hate-dominated or ideologically motivated narratives existing in the virtual and cyber environments (Chifu, 2023). In this sense, the element of novelty that this paper aims to assume, consists in the unequivocal reflection on some conceptual gaps identified in the specialized literature by highlighting the particularities of the two phenomena.

The evaluation of the conceptual elements of anti-Semitism

The roots of anti-Semitism have existed since ancient times, being one of the most controversial manifestations of racial discrimination. One of the hardest lessons for humanity—the Holocaust (Brustein, Ronnkvist, 2002) – highlighted that the tolerance of anti-Semitic attitudes led to unimaginable atrocities coordinated by the Nazi regime against human life and dignity (Gordon, 2023). Thus, according to European values governed by respecting and guaranteeing human rights and human freedom, as well as equal opportunities and treatment, preventing and combating anti-Semitism is a cornerstone for strengthening European principles and also for strengthening societal security and resilience (Strategy regarding combating anti-Semitism and Fostering Jewish Life, 2021–2030). The indissoluble link between combating anti-Semitism as a guarantee of respect for human rights, European values, and principles of law and measuring the level of democratization of the state (Dudek, 2023) emerges clearly starting from the definition proposed by the European Commission regarding anti-Semitism, according to which anti-Semitism is defined as a perception of Jews expressed through hatred, physical manifestations, or attitudes, including hostile rhetoric regarding their right to property, religious facilities, or Jewish community and institutions (European Commission, 2021).

Although the definition is not legally binding for European member states (Strategy on Combating Anti-Semitism and Fostering Jewish Life, 2021–2030), it has been criticized for the lack of clarity or particularity regarding the manifestation of anti-Semitism (Hersh, Royden, 2023), a fact that can involve challenges both in the implementation of prevention and combat measures by the member states and regarding the development of a set of uniform practices at the European level (Dudek, 2023). However, nuanced differences exist between anti-Semitism sometimes classified as an ancestral hatred of Jews, disregarding and discriminating against

Jews on racial, ethnic grounds as inferior beings, or portraying real or imagined characteristics of Jews in a hostile and inflammatory form to aggression and social contempt (Romania's Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Antisemitism, 2021-2023), and on the other hand anti-Judaism as aggression and hostility directed against Judaism as a religion or the religious community of Jews or anti-Zionism as the repression of the legitimacy of the State of Israel and the desire for destruction directed against the Israeli authority and nation (Prove, 2019).

Moreover, component elements such as hate speech found in social media, electoral campaigns, the press, or any other type of environment containing aspects related to anti-Semitism constitute the instrument of coercion and persuasion of public perception in order to distort attitudes about Jews and maintain anti-Semitic conceptions in the collective mind of society. However, the challenge in preventing anti-Semitism comes at the bottom of the legislative pillar of each state, in the sense that elements such as hate speech (INSHR-EW, 2016), denial or selective denial of the Holocaust (Cârstocea, 2014), crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes must be incriminated by the Penal Code in every European democratic state despite the judicial challenges (Pech, 2009), as a necessity established by the 2008 EU Decision for Combating Racism and Xenophobia. For example, Romania criminalizes the denial of the Holocaust through the provisions of Law No. 217/2015.

Despite the fact that, the European Commission and NGOs dedicated to the protection of Jewish culture are concerned with updating surveys from year to year on incidents of anti-Semitism in European states, there is a likelihood that they do not truly reflect public perception to the extent that the instruments of reporting at the level of authorities and public institutions are fragile or victims do not address the authorities due to the low degree of trust (Center for Legal Resources, 2017). Anti-Semitic attitudes are concentrated around hostile, derogatory perceptions maintained or perpetuated through hateful speech about Jews. These attitudes materialize in acts of discrimination and damage to fundamental values and human rights, demonstrating the link between anti-Semitism and belief in conspiracy theories as a vulnerability factor that allows the acceptance and dissemination of anti-Semitic views (Allington et al., 2023).

Even though there has been a theoretical objection to the identification of anti-Israeli perceptions with anti-Semitism (Klug, 2013), a statistical link between attitudes towards Jews and attitudes towards Israel has been repeatedly found in several international contexts (Beattie, 2017; Bergmann, 2020), observing a common element regarding the incidence of anti-Semitism that finds expression both in Judeophobic anti-Semitism and in anti-Zionist anti-Semitism (Allington et al., 2022a). Also, starting from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition developed in 2016 regarding anti-Semitism, researchers have identified several conceptual gaps or confusions created around the definition (Deckers, Coulter, 2022), according to which anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews based on hatred, and rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed against Jews or non-Jews and/or their property, as well as against Jewish community institutions and their places of worship. In this sense, criticism exists around the use of the notion of perception in the context where rather emotions and beliefs can be expressed compared to perceptions. Likewise, the unilateral framing of anti-Semitism under the umbrella of hatred towards Jews is insufficient, in the sense that there can also be anti-Semitic cases identified by prejudices related to Jews or hostility (Veracini, 2022) without the existence of feelings of hatred.

In this sense, compared to the definitions presented previously, the following conceptual elements characteristic of anti-Semitism can be distinguished:

- Anti-Semitism represents a collection of perceptions, prejudices, emotions, and beliefs directed against Jews or against Jewish values, traditions, and culture.
- Anti-Semitism may or may not contain hatred directed against Jews. Although in most cases, hatred is predominantly identified in anti-Semitic narratives as being directed

against this social category, on the other hand, reflections characterized by hostility, contempt, racial supremacy, and repulsion equally characterize anti-Semitic visions. Constitutive elements of anti-Semitism also consist of attitudes of disapproval or hostility directed against places of worship, objects of value, Jewish culture, or considered heritage, manifested by the desire to destroy or vandalize them.

- Denial of the Holocaust represents a strong anti-Semitic element by excluding the historical consequences of the past and the genocide committed with the aim of exterminating the Jews.

- Anti-Semitism can manifest both cognitively through narratives containing hostility, prejudice, or hatred directed against Jews, as well as from the perspective of discrimination through unequal treatment or hostile attitudes committed unequivocally under this consideration.

The evaluation of the conceptual elements that characterize radicalization

Radicalization, which has become a subject of interest for researchers, especially since the 2000s, is characterized by some theorists as the starting point for studying the roots of terrorism (Sageman, 2004), being assimilated many times as a subject of confusion or lacking an approach to a unanimously accepted concept related to the definition, the theoretical framework, the understanding of the causes, and the factors that accelerate or influence the manifestation of this process (Awan *et al.*, 2012). However, radicalization was essentially defined as a psycho-social process that most theorists developed in order to bring about socio-political changes in society (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 198) or an individual process characteristic of a person who promotes or disseminates a radical ideology without committing acts of violence (Hamid, 2015) or, on the contrary, representing the gradualism of the intensity of the ideological embrace as a period prior to committing a terrorist attack (Sedgwick, 2010, p. 479). Thus, a first conceptual nuance is observed, in the sense that the result of the advanced stage of radicalization can lead to the dissemination of an extremist ideology, most of the time using a strong ideological language accompanied by visual elements of atrocious violence consisting of beheadings, burning of people, torture, etc. (Hertog, 2019), or on the other hand, the radicalization process can culminate in engaging in terrorist acts or attempts (Borum, 2011).

On the other hand, another specificity regarding the definition of the radicalization process consists in differentiating radicalization as an individual process (cognitive and behavioral) from radicalization as a process determined by the dynamics of a social group or inspired by a community (Sinai, 2012). In this sense, radicalization is defined as a radical change in perceptions, conceptions and behavior in order to justify violence in order to satisfy the objectives of a social group or to promote sacrifice in the idea of promoting the ideological mission of a group (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008, p. 416), or on the other hand an individual process by which a person incorporates and appropriates the radical ideology inspired by a terrorist organization by adopting extreme political, religious or social ideals and aspirations in order to legitimize violence indiscriminately (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010, p. 38) or a psycho-social process carried out by an individual, a group or a mass of people with the aim of determining a change at the political level justifying the achievement of certain interests through violent means (Crosset & Spitaletta, 2010, p. 10).

It can therefore be observed that radicalization is unanimously understood as a process carried out at a psychological level and socially influenced, with the nuance of some versions in the sense of the personalization of the process at a personal level following individual vulnerabilities, decisions, and personal motivation (Al Raffie, 2013), or as a collective process, understood in the form of an individual's need to belong to a collective, inspired by the dynamics of a social group, or advanced by quantifying shared goals and interests through the

prism of a collective identity (Mandel, 2012). Also, another peculiarity consists in the fact that, although the process of radicalization can be carried out at an individual level by embracing extremist ideology and adhering to religious or social objectives whose quantification is justified by violence, identification at a personal level is triggered as inspiration or as a model of a terrorist organization (Matusitz, 2022), a fact found in most cases of individual radicalization in the virtual environment (Jones&Wright, 2017). Compared to the process of individual radicalization, coordinated or developed radicalization following group dynamics is most often achieved through a terrorist organization by recruiting, training, indoctrinating members, and spreading extremist goals and ideology.

Another conceptual peculiarity consists in the characterization of the radicalization process as a gradual cognitive unfolding (Helfstein, 2012), staged in scales (Moghaddam, 2005) or gradual in paths, respectively engagement or disengagement phases (Horgan, 2008) of the degree of incorporation of extremist ideology and change in perception and thinking, followed by behavioral change in habits, food style, clothing, or preferences, mostly caused by the excessive normativity of violent Islamic ideology through rigorous and drastic directing of lifestyle and prohibition/restriction of a set extended by everyday aspects and behaviors (Van Den Elzen, 2018). On the other hand, in contrast, although the rule of gradual acceptance and incorporation of extremist ideology determined by psychological and social factors (Horgan & Bradock, 2010) is shared by theorists as characteristic of the radicalization process (Lygre et al., 2011), the cases of triggering and sudden advancement of radicalization confirmed the atypical scenarios of radicalization. However, regardless of the gradualism of the radicalization process or the sudden advancement in adherence to an extremist ideology, the border between the existence of cognitive or behavioral radicalization and the process of engaging in terrorist actions is outlined as a line between violent radicalization and terrorism (Kruglanski et al., 2014).

At the same time, the definitions by which radicalization is described as a staged manifestation related to the grounding of ideas and mentalities or the intensification of feelings of hatred, contempt and anger projected on a social group and the authorities is found in the form of exposure as the process as a progressive evolution from the moderate Islamic faith to fundamentalist Islam (Taarnby, 2005) or in the form of a cognitive process through which people gradually adopt opinions and ideas that could lead to the legitimization of political or religious violence (Jensen et al, 2020) or a process of individual development in the sense of adopting some ideas political-religious extremes (Kassim, 2008) that justify the exercise of violence in order to materialize them through radical methods (Al Lami, 2009). However, it can be noted that none of the listed definitions fully exposes the specificities of radicalization as a manifestation, in the sense that the incorporation of Islamic fundamentalist views can also occur in the case of people who do not previously share the moderate Islamic religion or have previously converted to Islam (Aly, Striegheer, 2012). On the other hand, the description of radicalization as an eminently cognitive process is insufficient because it does not take into account the behavioral manifestation, as part of the process, determined by the incorporation of certain habits, preferences, or restrictions specific to Islamic fundamentalism.

However, radicalization as a psycho-social process, understood both from an individual and collective perspective (Schmid, 2013), is characterized by the repression of the legitimacy of state authority or the existing order in society (Demant, Slooman, Buijs & Tillie, 2008) by consolidating a vision dichotomous about society, marked by social isolation and justification of actions or narratives through violent ideology (Moghaddam, 2005). In essence, the development of the process starts with the rejection of democratic principles and the justification of the use of violence to achieve political-religious goals (Ashour, 2009) by adopting violent strategies to achieve political goals (Olesen, 2009) and the delegitimization of state authority or societal pillars, followed by the withdrawal of the individual within an isolated

community that promotes an extremist ideology (Demant, Sloodman, Buijs, & Tillie, 2008). Thus, the commitment to fight for a violent goal, a cause affiliated with the ideological group or inspired by it (McCauley, Moskalenko, 2008), ultimately accumulates as the result of the radicalization process. In the literature, this decisive split of the advanced stage of radicalization has been highlighted, which can alternate between the exercise of violent actions through terrorist attacks or stagnate in the dissemination of propaganda and extremist ideology or the recruitment of new people to share the dichotomous vision, but without committing acts of violence (Bartlett et al., 2010).

It is clear that radicalization involves a process that leads in many cases to the probability of committing a terrorist attack, being strongly characterized by the risks generated by the urge to commit violence and the extermination of a social group (Wiktorowicz, 2005). Moreover, this interpretation is crucial for understanding the differences between radicalization, which is a psycho-social process that incorporates violent ideology (Galonnier, 2022) and legitimizes the use of violence on a cognitive level, and, on the other hand, terrorism, which represents the manifestation of violent actions in real terms by targeting some social categories (Post, 2007). So, starting from the previously presented definitions, two other conceptual elements characteristic of the radicalization process can be distinguished, namely the concept of violence (Jensen et al., 2020) related to the type of ideology adopted, incorporated, and most often disseminated (Veldhuis, Staun, 2009), as well as the concept of delegitimization of state authority, social order, or democratic society values (Della Porta & LaFree, 2008:4–10). These aspects are fundamental both to understand the risks generated by the phenomenon itself existing at a continental or global level as well as to distinguish between radicalization and other manifestations such as activism, which involves the use of peaceful means, as well as a non-violent ideology oriented towards mitigating and promoting values in line with democracy and human rights.

Precisely related to these considerations, it is essential to distinguish between the concept of radicalization, the imminence of a violent ideology, or the pursuit of the fruition of illegitimate goals in relation to democratic or constitutional values (Chifu et al., 2012). At the same time, the motivation to hijack state authority, social order, and democratic values and to impose a new social, political, and religious order, being justified and legitimized by violent ideology, leads to the dichotomous vision of society: "us versus them" (Murshed, Tadjoeeddin, 2009), as a specific characteristic of radicalized people (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2009). These last elements are underlined from the much more complex definition of radicalization by Alex Schmid in the form of an individual or collective process on the part of rebel factions in a situation of political polarization, a process accompanied by an ideological socialization oriented towards the status quo and radical or extremist positions involving a dichotomous worldview and the acceptance of political mobilization outside the dominant political order because the existing system is no longer recognized as adequate or legitimate (Schmid, 2016).

Therefore, by extracting the previously presented aspects at a general level and applying them in relation to the typology of radicalization, the following characteristic conceptual elements emerge:

- Radicalization is a process that can be developed both individually and coordinated or collectively inspired by the dynamics of a social group. Also, this relationship is interdependent in the sense that, even if the psycho-social process takes place at a personal level, for example, in cases of individual radicalization by referring to micro-type factors, the process involves the side of ideological socialization (Syed Mansoob, Pavan, 2011) or the inspiration of a higher meaning, dichotomous us versus them by referring to the violent goals shared by a community or a group (Simon, Klandermans, 2001).

- Radicalization involves incorporation at the individual level and adherence to a violent ideology, which legitimizes the use of means of force, oppression, and aggression for

the ideologically promoted objectives and goals that are opposed to democratic values, good morals, or social order (Wali, 2017).

- Radicalization is a psychological and social process, the triggering of which is influenced by various factors, understood both at the micro and macro levels (Molix, Nichols, 2012), involving a cognitive component but very often also a behavioral one.

- Radicalization is characterized as a rule of gradualness regarding ideological incorporation, the intensification of emotions that accompany the process, or the grounding of a new set of mentalities and beliefs. At the same time, the exception confirms the fact that some cases of radicalization can be triggered suddenly, reaching an advanced state, following a strong identity or emotional crisis of the subject.

- Radicalization has as its objective the social, political, or religious change in society being influenced by the ideological perspective, and equally at the individual level, it involves the vehement change of the person's beliefs and perceptions (Ferguson, McAuley, 2020).

- Self-radicalization through virtual means such as social media and the Internet accelerates the dissemination of radical ideology, being the most widespread method of radicalization and at the same time demonstrating the technological impact on individual changes (Halverson, Way, 2012).

- Radicalization does not always involve active engagement in terrorist acts. Moreover, given that it is a psycho-social process, it can involve the advancement of the radicalization stage to the point of committing acts of violence, stagnation of the process, or disengagement, characterized by the unpredictability of the finality of the process (Schuurman, Taylor, 2018).

Consequently, in order to quantify the research objectives in the first stage, by analyzing the conceptual elements of the two phenomena in a mirror, the following conceptual differences can be observed:

- If antisemitism targets narratives or attitudes containing hostility or hatred directed against Jews that lead to discrimination, on the other hand, radicalization includes the concept of violence through calls to mobilization and aims to exterminate the social group.

- If anti-Semitism includes personal perceptions or prejudices about Jews, radicalization operates as a result of the appropriation of a collectively shared radical ideology.

- Unlike radicalization, which is a psychological and social process, usually gradual, triggered by the radical change of conceptions, associated emotions and habits of the individual, on the other hand, anti-Semitic attitudes concern the coagulation of perceptions created many times, as a result of vulnerability to conspiracy theories.

- Another difference consists in the fact that anti-Semitism does not determine the engagement in terrorist acts, while the advanced stage of radicalization can in some cases lead to such a finality.

Equally, the similarity between the two phenomena includes the targeted objectives: targeting Jews in the case of anti-Semitism or, in terms of radicalization, some radical ideologies may target this social category depending on the nature of the goals pursued. Another similarity regarding the manifestation of the two phenomena includes the strong impact produced in the virtual environment, which can determine the speed of narratives of hatred or violence directed against Jews. On the other hand, with regard to the research objective regarding the identification of risks generated on a societal level related to the European trends triggered by the events of October 7, 2023, caused by the Israel-Hamas war (Abbas, 2023), the explosion of anti-Semitic feelings fueled in the sea of propaganda elements related to the cognitive war led by Hamas (Schweitzer, Siman-Tov, 2022), can impact European states in the medium term in relation to the deformation of public perception and social polarization (Flamer, 2023). In this regard, an important point to note is that the 2023 polls pointed out that, as of October 7, anti-Semitism in the US (Wright et al., 2022) has increased by a percentage of 337% since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza and

by 591% in Australia compared to the previous level, consisting of incidents, vandalism, and harassment. In Europe, countries such as Great Britain, Spain, Belgium, and France have recorded an upward trend of anti-Semitic incidents (ADL, 2023) compared to the recorded level in the previous year (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023).

Conclusions

This paper proposed a mirror analysis of the specific conceptual elements of both anti-Semitism and radicalization in order to highlight the specificity of the two phenomena. Following the theoretical analysis carried out by reviewing the specialized literature, it was highlighted that although both phenomena generate confusion at the theoretical level regarding the elaboration of a unanimously accepted theoretical framework, nevertheless, often at the strategic level, the elaboration of their preventive measures treats them cumulatively. Thus, it was highlighted that although anti-Semitism is essentially defined on the basis of perceptions generated by hatred, in practice, most of the cases assimilated to anti-Semitism target prejudices or offensive attitudes that are not exclusively generated by feelings of hatred. In contrast, radicalization as a process characterized by the assimilation of an extremist ideology is centered on a manifestation through the prism of the concept of violence, in the sense that targeting Jewish or Israeli objectives seeks the extermination of the social group.

At the same time, the highest risks generated by radicalization exist in the high possibility of leading to terrorist attack attempts if the signals regarding the advanced stage of the process are not identified early. On the other hand, as highlighted in the theory and in the event that radicalization does not lead to engaging in terrorist acts at the action level, significant risks are also generated by the dissemination of violent materials and a system of beliefs and perceptions that incites the hijacking of social order and democratic values. Although radicalization can be found in the form of political radicalization (from the left or right aiming to undermine state authority or achieve political goals through the use of acts of extremism), Islamic radicalization inspired or coordinated by Islamist terrorist organizations (ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, etc.), or ethnic radicalization that polarizes its objectives mainly on the extermination of a social group through the prism of racial reasons, this theoretical delimitation should not be applied in reality in a reductionist way. For example, many times terrorist organizations such as Hamas have both a political goal (the destruction of the state of Israel), but on the other hand, they are also supported by an extremist ideology of Islamist origin, which also involves aspects related to religious fundamentalism. Also, in reality, although the violent objectives are directed against the State of Israel and Israeli objectives, on the territory of other states, they may target Jewish objectives even if they are not assimilated to the State of Israel, such as targeting synagogues or eliminating people of Jewish faith.

Last but not least, what is particularly important to note is that the intensification of anti-Semitic views can show the driving effect of radicalization and create a fertile background for the assimilation of a radical ideology to be molded on already existing views, but there is no direct correlation but only a probability between these two phenomena. Related to this consideration, one can insist on the fact that a percentage of people with anti-Semitic views signal vulnerabilities in relation to the assimilation of an extremist ideology oriented against Israeli or Jewish objectives and values. But equally, anti-Semitism can exist without involving processes of radicalization or an affiliated extremist ideology, just as, per contrario, radicalization containing an ideology aimed at the annihilation of the State of Israel or the extermination of the Jews can also occur without an anti-Semitic background.

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SINGAPORE: BALANCING BETWEEN WEST AND EAST

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Abstract: *Due to its location at the intersection between the spheres of influence of multiple regional players, as well as its socio-cultural composition, Singapore had to conduct a diplomatic policy of balancing in order to secure its existence and develop its armed forces. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the defence policy of the state of Singapore, the characteristics of its military cooperation with its main partners and whether the diplomatic policy of balancing diplomatic relationships with powerful countries, motivated by diverging goals, impacts the military development of Singapore. The research method used is the observation of the military diplomatic relations of Singapore's armed forces, as well as the of its military acquisition policies.*

Keywords: *alliance; gateway; military diplomacy; influence; strategic partnerships.*

Preliminary considerations

Ever since its independence, Singapore had to contend with a series of challenges to its survival and prosperity, due to a multitude of reasons.

One has been its geographical position, the location of the state allowing its government to control and, if need be, interdict the maritime traffic through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, one of the most transited such areas in the world.

Another reason has been its relatively small sized-territory, Singapore's surface placing it more in the category of city-states, its size being dwarfed by that of its neighbours.

One further reason has been, due to the policies of the Singapore government, its internal structure dictating its foreign affairs actions. Singapore has been, since its inception, a multicultural place, where the majority of its citizens are of ethnic Chinese descent sympathetic to China (Yong 2021), with considerable numbers of citizens being of Indian or Malay ethnicities, Singapore itself thus having to balance not only these ethnic groups, but, more importantly, the countries of origins of these groups.

As a result, Singapore has conducted ever since its inception a policy of military and economic cooperation with powers around the world, countries such as Israel being one of its main partners. At the same time, Singapore conducts a balancing policy between the two main regional players, the United States of America (U.S.) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Singapore conducts activities such as those of military diplomatic nature, such as training exercises, with the militaries of each state, thus becoming a gateway for conducting diplomacy, such as the 2018 Summit organized to mediate between the United States and the Chinese-aligned North Korea the finding of common ground in order to de-escalate the tensions in the Korean peninsula.

Singapore's overarching national defence strategy is that of "Total Defence" meant to protect the country through measures taken to reinforce the military, civilian, economic, social, psychological and digital sectors of the Singapore society (Government of Singapore 2024).

Thus, in order to strengthen the military sector, the Singapore government has taken steps with regards to the development of efficient military industry, able to build and maintain weapon systems to defend against the latest regional security challenges. The other important aspect to strengthen this sector has been the creation and maintaining of a well-trained military force, consisting

of both an active duty component, as well as a reserve component, regularly called up for training, in order to be able to be promptly activated and deployed alongside the active duty servicemen.

Since its establishment, the State of Singapore's survival depended on the evolution of its military diplomatic relations with powerful states, such as Israel, U.S. and P.R.C. in order to organise and develop its armed forces and military industry.

1. Significant military relations of the state of Singapore

1.1 Singapore-Israel military relations

Ever since their establishment, both the Israeli state, as well as the Singaporean one faced similar situations.

Firstly, both Singapore and Israel had neighbouring countries that were able to field not only large armed forces, but also military industrial complexes necessary to support these units in case of a conventional conflict.

Secondly, the neighbours of Singapore and Israel were, particularly during the Cold War, most willing to threaten the sovereignty of the new states, in Israel's case due to religious motives, whilst in Singapore's case due to geopolitical reasons.

Thus, the strategic partnership between the states has been one of natural necessity for Singapore. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) starting deployment of military advisers to Singapore for training its fledgling armed forces even from 1965, the year Singapore became independent, with Singapore, particularly, enjoying the benefits of such cooperation (Maital 2023).

Firstly, Singapore modelled its armed forces after those of the IDF, relying on a core of active duty servicemen meant to respond quickly to an emergency, augmented by a large mass of reservists. Furthermore, as in the case of the IDF, the state of Singapore prefers to use yearly conscription in order to replenish the ranks of the armed forces and to conduct regular exercises to maintain the readiness of the reservists (National Heritage Board 2022).

Secondly, Israel's military industry has provided the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) not only with the military systems necessary to equip its units, but, most importantly, to develop Singapore's indigenous capabilities, with cooperation between Singapore and Israeli defence contractors routinely taking place to this day (ST Engineering 2020) (DSTA 2023a).

Israel also continues to enjoy the results of its long running partnership with Singapore. Ranging from purchases of Israeli designed military equipment by the Singapore Armed Forces and intelligence sharing for counter-terrorism purposes to commercial cooperation in areas such as biotechnology, both the Israeli government and the Israeli private sector are benefitting from the special relationship between the two states (MITTELMAN 2016).

1.2 Singapore-Commonwealth military relations

Singapore's past, present and, to an extent, future continues to also be tied to those of the United Kingdom and the South-East Asian countries that gained independence after the disestablishment of the British Empire, primarily Australia, Malaysia and New Zealand (Commonwealth members).

The 1967 retreat of a large proportion of the British military units deployed to the East of the Suez Canal resulted in the newly independent countries in the area, Singapore included.

In order to pre-empt possible conflicts between the new nations and to strengthen military cooperation, the British government, nonetheless, initiated the establishment of a series of treaties between the Commonwealth members of the area, with this set of documents being termed the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) (Mahmud 2022).

Under these Arrangements, the abiding parties consented to mutual consultation in case of an attack or a threat from an external source, whilst at the same time providing the blueprints for deepening defence cooperation.

In the case of Singapore, the main effect of the Arrangements was the continuation of the existence of the Singapore Naval Base operated by the Royal Navy, transformed into the British Defence Singapore Support Unit, its main purpose being that of serving as a staging area for the deployment of Royal Navy task forces in the region (Zakaria 2024) (Ministry of Defence 2023), with Royal Navy carrier task forces making regular visits in the South China Sea whilst having Singapore as a launch point (Lin 2021). At the same time, the FPDA continues to be a source of security for Singapore, with regular exercises taking place in which the Singapore Armed Forces take part in order to enhance between its units and those of the regional allied nations (MINDEF Singapore 2023).

1.3 Singapore-U.S. military relations

Another important pillar of Singapore’s military system has been its relationship with the United States. Even though the relation started under strenuous grounds, the Singaporean government trying to maintain a balance between all the regional powers (TIME 1965), Singapore eventually moderated its stance, the relationship with the United States becoming one of increased cooperation (Chang 2015) (Sim 2019).

One important aspect of this relationship has been the expanding role of the American military industry as a key supplier of weapon systems and capabilities to the Singaporean Armed Forces, one of Singapore’s most valued assets, and thus a guarantee of its survival, its combat aircraft fleet being manufactured in the United States (BUREAU OF POLITICAL-MILITARY AFFAIRS 2023).

Another aspect of this relationship, that of establishment of common training detachments and bases, has been solidified by the signing of a number of treaties, such as the 2005 Strategic Framework Agreement (MINDEF Singapore 2023), as well as the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding United States Use of Facilities in Singapore (MINDEF Singapore 2019). Thus, in order to increase interoperability between the Singapore Armed Forces and the United States Armed Forces, the Singaporean government stationing detachments of aircraft and air force personnel at American military bases in Guam and Arizona (MINDEF Singapore 2017), whilst the United States constantly deploys warships and maritime patrol aircrafts to Singapore, to increase the cooperation between the two nations, as well as conduct “freedom of movement” and surveillance operations in the South China Sea (Mahadzir 2023).

One particularity of the Singapore-US military relationship has been that the places of deployment of American forces on Singapore soil have not been termed as military bases (MINDEF Singapore 2019) (MINDEF Singapore 2023), being instead defined as “military facilities for transit and logistics support” (MINDEF Singapore 2019). Also, since 2022, the Singaporean Armed Forces have started taking part in the Garuda Shield exercises lead by the United States and its partners in the region, such as Australia and Japan, signalling the deepening of ties between Singapore and the United States (MINDEF Singapore 2023).

1.4. Singapore-PRC military relations

Although the Singaporean government was initially wary during the Cold War of extending relations with China, partially due to the presence of a sizeable percentage of ethnic Chinese in Singapore, as well as partially due to the ideological differences between the two countries’ ideologies, Maoism and liberalism, the rapprochement between the United States and China during the 1970s resulted in a similar thaw in Singapore-PRC relations.

Their initial contacts in trade were followed (Woon 2023), especially after the end of the Cold War, by an increased military cooperation between the Singaporean Armed Forces and the People’s Liberation Army, resulting also in a drawdown in the interactions between the SAF and Taiwan’s military.

The emphasis of Singapore-PRC's military relationship has been placed, so far, on training, with the 2008 Agreement on Defence Exchanges and Security Cooperation, as well as the 2022 Agreements leading to regular common exercises being conducted by the militaries of the two nations, as well as the establishment of academic exchange programs for military students of the two nations (Singapore 2008) (Aqil Haziq 2022), with the recent 2023 Memorandum of Understanding expanding the cooperation into deconfliction procedures, with the establishment of an urgent telephone link between the military leaderships of the two countries (MINDEF Singapore 2023).

Thus far, the Chinese government has neither signalled any intent of deploying troops to Singapore soil, in a similar manner to the American forces deployed in the city-state, even though the move has reportedly been considered (Office of the Secretary of Defence 2020).

At the same time, another noteworthy aspect of the Singapore-PRC military diplomatic relationship is that there have been neither no official trade of military technology between the two states, nor any official announcement results of a military technical cooperation between the two countries.

2. Singapore's military industrial complex

One of Singapore's greatest assets with regards to its survival as a state and the overall American-Chinese competition in the area is, undoubtedly, its own military industrial complex.

From its independence, Singapore has sought to establish itself as a considerable military power, both in terms of actual armed forces and, also, in terms of capabilities of its own military industry.

One such attempt has been the establishment of the Chartered Industries of Singapore, a company focused mainly on the maintenance of foreign designed small arms, light weapons and their associated ammunition (Chua 2022). With the passing of time, the company evolved into current day ST Engineering, with the three branches, Aerospace, Land and Maritime (ST Engineering 2023a), servicing the needs of the corresponding branches of the Singapore Armed Forces. At the same time, in order to ensure the Singaporean Armed Forces are kept supplied with equipment that cannot be manufactured in Singapore, the government established the Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA), whose main objective is that of managing the entire defence procurement systems (DSTA 2023b).

At the same time, one of the things to be noticed is that, although so far, Singapore was focused on the importation, maintenance and upgrade of military technology from countries such as Germany, France or the United States, to an extent, its military industry is trying to become capable of assimilating foreign designs into production, a major step into becoming self-sufficient.

In the aerial domain, the Singapore Air Force has consistently equipped its units with equipment designed in foreign countries, such as the F-15E, the F-16, and the AH-64 forming the bulk of Singapore's combat air fleet (Force, author's note). The recent purchase of F-35s from the U.S., especially the insufficient numbers thus far (12) (Yeo 2023a), may be interpreted as signalling that, in the foreseeable future, Singapore will continue ordering more F-35s to replace the 4th generation aircraft in service, thus further relying on foreign designed airplanes to secure its airspace.

In the naval domain, this tendency continues, with the Singaporean Navy relying so far on foreign designed platforms, such as the Formidable class frigates from France and the Type 218 class submarines being envisioned to form the backbone of Singapore's combat seafaring force in the near-future (MINDEF Singapore 2024a) (MINDEF Singapore 2024b). At the same time, the start of the Multi-role Combat Vessels frigates program signals the start of Singapore's attempts into becoming a self-sufficient military ship manufacturer, with the six vessels, although developed from the Danish Iver Huitfeldt and Absalon class frigates, are stated to be

manufactured at the ST Engineering shipyards in Singapore (Yeo, 2023b), a major steps in ensuring Singapore's ability to protect its maritime borders.

In the land domain, also, the Singaporean military industries are starting to become self-sufficient, with systems such as the Hunter and Terrex Armoured Fighting Vehicles entering service in considerable numbers (MINDEF Singapore 2024c) (MINDEF Singapore 2024d). At the same time, it must be kept in mind that, even in the case of these vehicles, they remain reliant on foreign sourced equipment, such as power packs being purchased from the United States and Germany (Wong 2019) (ST Engineering 2023b), whilst the turrets originate from Israel (Dombe 2019).

At the same time, it can be considered that the continued reliance of the Singapore Armed Forces for foreign designed equipment has impacted Singapore's potential as a weapons exporter. Singapore's military exports have thus far been limited in both scope and scale, with the only notable exception being small numbers of armoured fighting vehicles being delivered to Ghana and Thailand (Claes 2004) (Boguslavsky 2020).

Conclusions

Currently, Singapore nominally to maintain its policy of neutrality between the United States and China, its armed forces carrying out exercises regularly with the militaries of these nations. At the same time, Singapore continues to have a favoured relationship with the United States, as well as the United Kingdom, allowing deployment of American and British military detachments on Singaporean soil meant to conduct operations in the South China Sea, being possible to argue that the United States, and to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom, hold a greater degree of influence in Singapore compared to that of China's.

Furthermore, this tendency continues with regards to the acquisitions policies conducted by the Singaporean Armed Forces, with most of its weapon systems coming from Western countries, such as France, Germany and Denmark or from the United States.

The potential of the outbreak of an open conflict between the United States and China would prove disastrous to the region and, especially to Singapore, whose best chance of preventing such a situation would be by deepening its policy of balance between the two world powers and continuing to actively promote cooperation between the two of them, with Singapore continuing its role as a gateway of diplomacy.

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NAVIGATING THE TURBULENCE: UNRAVELING THE NEXUS BETWEEN TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE, CONFLICT AND RESILIENCE

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Abstract: *This paper explores the intricate relationship between transport infrastructure, military operations, and national resilience in the context of today's interconnected world, highlighting the crucial role of transport systems in modern conflicts and the importance of building resilience through robustness, redundancy, resourcefulness, and rapidity in transport systems. In this respect, policymakers should consider integrating resilience considerations into national security and infrastructure development policies, emphasizing international collaboration and a holistic approach to address the complex challenges posed by disruptions in transport infrastructure.*

Keywords: *transport; infrastructure; resilience; determinants; costs; limitations.*

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, much like the circulatory system is indispensable for the well-being of a living organism, transport infrastructure serves as the lifeblood of a nation's economy. The intricate network of roads, railroads, ports, airports, pipelines, and grids parallels the veins and arteries that ensure the seamless flow of blood, oxygen, and nutrients throughout the body. In the economic context, these transport arteries enable the smooth movement of goods, people, and information, connecting various regions and sustaining the vitality of industries. The efficiency of this transport circulatory system is crucial for economic health, just as the optimal functioning of the circulatory system is essential for sustaining life. Disruptions in either system can have cascading effects, limiting the ability to nourish and sustain the broader organism – be it a living body or a national economy.

Transport infrastructure typically refers to the physical and organizational components that facilitate the movement of goods, people, and information from one location to another, encompassing a broad range of interconnected systems, facilities, and networks designed to support the efficient and effective transportation of goods and passengers. Key elements of transport infrastructure include “fixed installations including roads, railways, airways, waterways, canals and pipelines and terminals such as airports, railway stations, bus stations, warehouses, trucking terminals” (Yilmaz and Çetin 2017, 29). In order to operate smoothly and efficiently, these physical components of the broader transport system are complemented by soft infrastructure, such as policies, regulations, and institutions responsible for the planning, financing, operation, and maintenance of these systems.

The crucial importance of transport infrastructure and the increased interdependence between the hard and soft transport infrastructure constitutes at the same time its greatest vulnerability, as unforeseen events or crises (ranging from major technical failures, serious accidents, natural disasters or armed conflicts) can significantly disrupt these systems, particularly if they lack inherent resilience, with significant economic, societal and military

implications. As transport infrastructure plays a pivotal role in connecting regions, enabling economic activities, and ensuring the mobility of military forces during both peacetime and conflict, the development and maintenance of robust transport infrastructure are essential for fostering economic growth, national security, and overall societal well-being.

Throughout history, the significance of transport in warfare has been pivotal, in shaping the outcomes of conflicts by influencing the speed, flexibility, and strategic positioning of military forces. Ancient civilizations recognized the strategic advantage of well-developed road networks for the swift movement of troops and supplies. The Roman Empire, for instance, constructed an extensive system of roads, such as the famous Via Appia, which facilitated the rapid deployment of legions across its vast territories. In medieval times, the construction of castles and fortifications was often strategically positioned near key transportation routes to control and protect vital passages. During the Napoleonic era, the introduction of railways revolutionized military logistics, enabling the swift mobilization of large armies. In the 20th century, the importance of transport in warfare was evident in the success of Blitzkrieg tactics during World War II, where fast-moving armoured units capitalized on well-developed road and rail networks.

In the landscape of modern military operations, transport infrastructure stands as a linchpin, playing a pivotal role in shaping the success and agility of armed forces. The ability to swiftly mobilize and strategically position troops is contingent on well-developed road, rail, and air networks. Military mobility, a cornerstone of contemporary warfare, relies on efficient transportation systems for rapid deployment to theaters of operation, as airports, seaports, and logistical hubs serve as crucial points of entry and exit for forces and equipment. Furthermore, the seamless flow of supplies and equipment, essential for sustained military campaigns, hinges on the efficiency of transport infrastructure. For example, in “Desert Shield/Desert Storm operation, 85% of the dry cargo moved by sea and 15% moved by air and... at some point, 100% of the unit equipment, ammo, food, medicines [...] had to move by surface” (Gardner 1996, 16). No military, regardless of its size or logistic prowess, can ensure the required transport infrastructure on its own as most of the transport infrastructure is developed and operated by civilian agencies and companies. An effective military utilization of the civilian transportation system thus relies on a framework of partnerships between public entities (in the realms of critical infrastructure development and protection) and collaborations between public and private sectors, commonly known as public-public and public-private partnerships. The military depends on successful cooperation with national and local transportation agencies, as well as the collaboration with private sector entities such as railroads, airlines, and shipping lines to ensure a seamless and efficient integration of resources and capabilities (Meurer et al. 2016, 1-11).

The aim of this paper is to delve into the intricate web of relationships among transport infrastructure, military operations, and national resilience, seeking to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play during conflicts. This research intends to shed light on the ways in which disruptions or enhancements in transport infrastructure can impact military strategies and influence national resilience, with the overarching goal is to contribute valuable insights for policymakers, military planners, and researchers, facilitating a more nuanced approach to conflict management and resilience-building in complex, interconnected systems.

1. Literature Review

The topic of transport infrastructure resilience has been the subject of numerous research papers in the past decade, but the literature review highlights that there is no common framework to approach the concept, as transport systems resilience is approached from a number of perspectives. Some authors have taken a more generic path, approaching transport infrastructure resilience as part of a broader framework tackling multiple areas, such as economic, environmental and social (Ayyub 2014, 925-936) or from a sustainable development, long term perspective (Walker, Deeming, Margottini and Menoni 2014, 925-936). Other studies

on the topic have focused on the impact of natural disasters, such as earthquakes (Bruneau et al 2003, 733-752), extreme weather events (Molarius et al 2014, 189-210; Croope and McNeil, 2011, 3-13) and climate change (Kong et al 2012 350-357; Taylor and Philip, 2010; Doll et al, 2010) on the transport infrastructure.

From the point of view of the connection between transport infrastructure and conflict, the literature approaches the importance of transport infrastructure from various perspectives. A broader approach considers transport infrastructure from the perspective of the armed conflict and the military and civilian implications of developing transport infrastructure in conflict areas (Gomez, 2018, 20). From a military perspective, the transport infrastructure is approached as a component of the critical infrastructure in the context of military operations in urban terrain, examining the various impacts the disruption of critical infrastructure may have on a military operation and on non-combatants (Patterson 2000). Other studies in the literature address the the impact of transportation infrastructure on military operations and its effect on power projection for NATO and US (Howell 2020), and the perspective of the impact of infrastructure on strategic mobility operations (Gardner 1996, 16; Kepe 2018).

Following the events unfolding in the war between Russia and Ukraine and its complex effects on numerous interrelated areas (military, economic, societal), the literature has been enriched with numerous studies related to the way the conflict has disrupted the transport routes in the area (David, Blasko and Ficzer 2023, 188-193), the potential scenarios for recovery of transport infrastructure (in particular aviation) after the end of the conflict (Kharazishvili et al 2022, 7-30) and assessing the transport and logistics support for grain supply chain in regional food safety (Rudyk, Bubela and Maciuk 2023, 223-233).

A broader perspective analyses the need for the development of the Trans-European transport and logistics system (TEN-T), in order to create a transport system capable of overcoming "weak spots" and improving the use of transport infrastructure, the effectiveness of cooperation between states and security issues (Smyrnov et al 2023).

2. The Significance of Transport Infrastructure in Modern Warfare

2.4 Control of transport infrastructure as a tool in grey zone conflicts

The globalized nature of today's world, the unprecedented interconnectedness of the world economies and the technological advances have made the world a smaller place and promoted development, but the downside of interconnected infrastructure means increasingly complex global supply chains, whose disruption can spread rapidly and may generate severe effects across the globe. The vulnerability of transport systems has increased along with the interdependence, making them more vulnerable to crises and disasters that may happen on the other side of the globe, and still rapidly affect numerous countries.

Nowadays, transport infrastructure plays a crucial role in grey zone conflicts, which typically involve ambiguous and non-traditional forms of aggression that fall below the threshold of open warfare. In these conflicts, transport infrastructure is increasingly being used as a tool of gaining influence and projecting power, but at the same time is becoming an attractive target for aggression.

Transport infrastructure, including roads, railways, ports, and airports, facilitates the movement of personnel, equipment, and supplies are an integral part of a country's critical infrastructure and as such, it has been traditionally considered a target in kinetic and asymmetric warfare alike, as controlling or disrupting these networks can have a significant impact on the ability of actors involved in conflicts to sustain their operations.

Mobility and flexibility have always been a crucial part of military operations, as they allow forces to rapidly respond to changing conditions, outmanoeuvre adversaries, seize strategic opportunities, and effectively engage in a dynamic and unpredictable battlefield

environment. Weakening or disrupting transport infrastructure is a common asymmetric tactic in grey zone conflicts, as non-state actors, insurgent groups, proxy forces or even state actors may target critical transportation links to destabilize regions or coerce governments without resorting to conventional military engagements.

A recent example is the manner in which the Houthi rebels, a Yemen based militia backed by Iran, has mounted what can be called a strategic ambush, targeting the vulnerable point for international trade that is the Red Sea area through attacks on ships from various countries, using drones and missiles. The declared purpose was to disrupt shipping links with Israel, in the context of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, but the consequences of the attack extended beyond that, as the Suez Canal was avoided by many shipping companies, that preferred to take a longer, but safer route, presuming an additional 4,000-mile journey around Africa. The impacts were first of all economical, as shipping companies have tripled container prices from Asia to Europe to cover the increased costs of the longer route, potentially exacerbating global inflation. At 26 October 2023, before the attacks, the FBX13 global ocean freight container pricing index, measuring 40' container prices across key port pairs from China/East Asia to the Mediterranean, was of \$1.371. The attacks started around the beginning of December 2023, with the result that at 22 December 2023 the FBX13 was at \$2.524, while the escalation of the situation raised the FBX13 at \$6.772 in 19 January 2024 (Freightos Data 2024). The effects of the attacks are not limited to commodities imported to Europe from China and other Asian countries, as the Red Sea and the Suez Canal have become also the main route of oil and liquefied natural gas cargoes, as following the conflict in Ukraine, Russia has significantly increased its oil exports towards India, while European countries have increased their imports of liquefied gas from the Middle East. Total oil shipments via the Red Sea Area (through the Suez Canal, the Bab el Mandeb strait and the SUMED pipeline) routes were in 2023 approximately 12% of total seaborne-traded oil in the first half, and approximately 8% of total world liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments (U.S. Energy Information Administration 2023).

State actors are also using the disruption of critical trade routes, ports, or transit points in order to exert economic pressure on targeted entities, influencing their behaviour or policies. For example, during the dispute between Qatar and its Gulf neighbours (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt) in 2017, there was an economic blockade imposed on Qatar, which disrupted maritime trade routes, impacting the flow of goods through key ports and affecting Qatar's economy on short term. Ironically, the blockade had positive medium term effects of increasing Qatar's economic independence from the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and its self-reliance and increased economic diversification (Kabanni 2021).

Another example is China, which is strategically leveraging the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a tool in the realm of grey zone conflict. The BRI, initially presented as a global infrastructure development project, has increasingly become a means for China to extend its influence and pursue geopolitical objectives. Through BRI investments, China gains economic footholds and political influence in partner countries, effectively creating dependencies. According to the Council for Foreign Relations' database, there are currently in the world 101 port projects in which Chinese entities have acquired varied equity ownership or operational stakes, in 63 countries on all continents except Antarctica (Council for Foreign Relations' database, 2024). Ports constitute one among various strategic elements within the Belt and Road Initiative, which encompasses diverse forms of transportation infrastructure, including roads, railways, airports, as well as energy-related infrastructure like pipelines, dams and also digital and communication infrastructure. Despite concerns that China might convert its control over ports worldwide to military use, to project its naval power, the most present threat comes from its strong influence over the global supply chains and trade routes. Another manner in which transport infrastructure is used by China to advance its interests is also related to investments.

The construction of critical infrastructure projects, such as ports and railways requires vast amounts of money, which China has been willing to offer worldwide. The problems arise when the partner nations (especially developing countries) struggle to repay these debts, which makes them even more vulnerable to Chinese influence.

Disputes over transport infrastructure can escalate tensions and serve as potential trigger points for broader conflicts, as grey zone conflicts often involve a delicate balance, and any disruption to critical transportation can escalate the situation, pushing it closer to open warfare. In the Taiwan Strait, disputes over control and access to maritime routes and airspaces are potential trigger points for escalation. China's assertiveness in the region, including its military activities near Taiwan, involves a careful consideration of these transportation-related factors.

2.5 Control of transport infrastructure as a tool of warfare

Control of transport infrastructure can be also used as a potent tool of warfare, influencing both strategic and logistical dimensions of conflict. During times of war, dominating key transportation networks, such as roads, railways, ports, and airports, enables a belligerent force to dictate the movement of troops, supplies, and resources. By disrupting or controlling these critical arteries, an aggressor can impede the mobility of enemy forces, weaken their logistical capabilities, and isolate strategic targets. Moreover, gaining control over transport hubs can provide a tactical advantage, allowing for rapid deployment and maneuverability. In modern warfare, cyber-attacks on transportation systems also present a novel dimension, disrupting communication networks and compromising the functioning of automated transportation systems.

Although NATO considers ground mobility as a priority area, the situation of the transport infrastructure in Europe is far from satisfying, as “the rate of infrastructure development within NATO member nations in Central and Eastern Europe diminishes the ability of the Joint Force to penetrate and exploit the standoff generated by Russia” (Howell, 2020). As an example, historically, the M60 main battle tank was the reference on which NATO defense planners assessed the capability of bridge and rail networks in Europe in order to ensure future transportation infrastructure could support the tanks' weight (Clapp and Cassidy 2002). The introduction of the M1 Abrams meant an increase in the weight of the armored platform of reference with 75% since 1975 (US Department of the Army 2020), with the result of placing a significant strain on transportation networks in Central and Eastern Europe.

The conflict in Ukraine has brought again to the attention the importance of transport infrastructure in military operations, as both strategic asset and target. According to the World Bank, by the middle of 2022, 18.7% of total national highways and motorways and 3.8% of all local roads had been damaged or destroyed (World Bank et al. 2022), with bridges as primary target for both Russia (which destroyed 17% of the total bridges on main roads) (World Bank et al. 2022), and Ukraine (the Kerch bridge), due to their logistical importance and the slowdown of the enemy forces as bridges require more time to be rebuilt. The air transport infrastructure has also been targeted (with almost half of the airports being damaged), together with the seaport infrastructure, 83.3% of the seaports being blocked or occupied (World Bank et al. 2022), generating a de-facto blockage of the cargo shipments and severely affecting the Ukrainian economy directly and indirectly. The situation has led to a food crisis half a world away, due to the increase in food prices caused by the drop in Ukrainian grain exports.

Beyond the military considerations related to mobility and logistics, the control and disruption of transport infrastructure and networks can also be used as an economic tool of warfare, alongside kinetic actions. The disruption of transport routes can also have serious indirect economic effects, with short term and medium term implications. Conflicts affecting transport routes have significant effects in terms of increase freight and insurance costs, as the transport distances and transit times increase, together with the risk for the insurers. For

example, following the conflict in Ukraine, the insurance costs for the ships navigating in the Black Sea have increased with 20%, due to the war risk premiums demanded by the insurers (Corbett 2023, 8). The impossibility to ship the usual quantity of cargo exported from Ukraine or imported to Russia also put increased pressure on the storage and warehousing facilities in various harbors, in Ukraine, Germany, Turkey or Netherlands, increasing the costs for other commodities (UNCTAD 2022, 14). The increase in the bulk freight rates following the conflict (for example, the Baltic Dry Index increased with 59% in just 4 months, between February 2022 and May 2022) contributes to an increase in the consumer good prices at global level (with 3.7% in 2022), generating an increase in the global inflation rate (UNCTAD 2022, 7).

The control over transport infrastructure can also be used in order to influence or manipulate the access to humanitarian aid. Disruption of transport infrastructure can hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in affected areas, presenting a complex challenge for international organizations and relief efforts. The Syrian conflict has seen deliberate targeting of transportation infrastructure, including roads and bridges, hindering the delivery of humanitarian aid and exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in various parts of the country (Relief Web 2023).

3. Building resilience through transport infrastructure

A well-developed and resilient transport infrastructure plays a pivotal role in bolstering national resilience by ensuring the smooth functioning of essential services, facilitating efficient logistics, and enhancing overall economic stability, especially in the modern world, where the interconnected nature of global systems amplifies the impact of even minor changes, surpassing initial disturbances in time, location, and scale. Robust transportation networks enable swift response and recovery in times of crises, including natural disasters, pandemics, or security threats. Efficient road and rail systems facilitate the timely movement of goods, emergency supplies, and personnel, aiding disaster relief efforts. Additionally, diversified and interconnected transportation modes contribute to reducing vulnerabilities associated with disruptions in a specific sector.

Extending the resilience model proposed by Bruneau (Bruneau et al 2003, 733-752) to transport infrastructure, four main areas of action can be identified in order to increase resilience:

- **Robustness** refers to measures aimed at improving the capacity of transport systems to withstand shocks without losing functionality. The robustness of the transport infrastructure starts with its status, as an old infrastructure, in need of repair or under the level of quality required has less chances to withstand shocks caused by natural disasters or to correspond to the requirements of moving troops in case of conflict. This is especially the case of Eastern Europe, as “while *Western* European infrastructure was often reinforced during the Cold War to handle the weight of 60-plus-ton NATO tanks, *Eastern* Europe couldn’t afford to build as robustly and, in any case, only had to accommodate much lighter *Soviet* tanks, like the 45-ton T-72” (Freedberg 2020). According to the model, another component of robustness is the physical interdependence, meaning the degree to which a specific system is dependent on other components of these systems. For example, railway transport is critically dependent on the power networks, maritime transport is critically dependent on communication and navigation systems. Any disruption of these systems (for instance as a result of a cyber-attack) would have serious consequences on the robustness of the transport system. Geographical interdependency refers to the interdependencies along the whole system, and the international supply chain is a good example in this respect. Failure in one of the components can have ripple effects throughout the entire system, as we have seen recently during the Covid pandemic or the Ukraine conflict.

- **Redundancy** refers to putting in place, ahead of the onset of the crisis, alternatives or substitutions for the routes already available (for example, using air transport to compensate

for disruption in road transport). Redundancy in respect to transport infrastructure is constrained by the availability and capability to develop alternative routes (for example, the replacement of road and railway transport is not always possible by waterways, as the latter may not correspond in terms of geographical location or capability to allow a specific size of the cargo. Another constraint is related to the sizable costs generated by building redundancy, which cannot easily be justified by the potential risk.

• **Resourcefulness** refers to the availability of resources necessary to respond to a disturbance. These resources may refer to the workforce, expertise and abilities, financial resources, material resources, procedures, communication systems, equipment etc. Proper planning is crucial to ensure resilience, but ensuring funding, making contingency plans or constituting emergency stocks is costly, time consuming and is often relegated as a lower priority compared to current and more pressing demands.

• **Rapidity** refers to reducing the downtime of a system or the response time to a specific disruption or crisis, which is dependent on the previously mentioned aspects, as well as on the proper design of the system or the existence of clear procedures. For instance, the availability of a well-trained/equipped engineer’s corps can significantly help with reducing the disruption in the event of the collapse/damage of a bridge or road.

Other authors (Thoroghi and Thomas 2020), propose a fifth dimension, **readjust-ability**, defined as the adaptation capacity of the system to its new environment, post-incident. Transport infrastructure can be damaged or destroyed in the aftermath of a crisis, but the ability to re-adjust the transport routes, re-divert traffic, find replacements for the damaged infrastructure, find sources of financing for construction projects to replace the damaged infrastructure is also an important component of transport infrastructure resilience.

The main problem associated with building resilience derives from the trade-offs decision makers have to address, between short term and long term considerations, between efficiency and the costs of building resilience. Resilience, by its very nature, is associated with a crisis or an unforeseen event. This often means that in order to build resilience, new investments have to be made addressing emerging risks and threats (upgrade transport infrastructure, build new roads, railways or ports), often entailing significant additional costs, which are sometimes difficult to justify to the taxpayers. To revisit the previous example, European taxpayers will probably not be very thrilled at having to pay for the improvement of existing roads and building new ones capable of accommodating the increased weight of armoured platforms, as the normal demands of traffic in a business-as-usual scenario does not require such additional costs.

Another issue is that (as a lesson identified from the Covid pandemic, but also from the conflict in Ukraine), building transport resilience means also incorporating redundancy into transport networks to shield against disruptions in global supply chains or the damage/destruction of transport infrastructure. Although beneficial from the point of view of building resilience, the addition of routes and modes to sustain services during disturbances generates increase cost generated by idle resources and efficiency losses. Building additional roads/railroads that are not used at full capacity during normal times, developing back-up processing facilities, building additional warehousing facilities comes against the current model of optimized production and transport systems (such as Just-in-Time logistic model) that has brought increased profits at a global scale, but has also significantly increased the vulnerability of supply chains to risks.

A potential solution to this conundrum would be to link resilience to national security considerations, such as the pressing need (recognized by both NATO and the EU) of improving military mobility across Europe (NATO 2018). NATO’s initiative “Enabling the Supreme Allied Commander Europe’s Area of Responsibility” outlines four main domains of action to this end: ensuring that member countries authorities and legislation facilitate border crossing;

command and control to direct the logistic moves; adequate lift capabilities that can transport troops and their equipment; and an infrastructure that can cope with large quantities of heavy military transport (Williams 2018). Significant progress has been made recently in the first item mentioned above, through the signing of a declaration of intent between Germany, the Netherlands and Poland on the development of a military corridor aimed at facilitating the movement of troops and equipment between Europe's North Sea ports and NATO's eastern flank (Ruitenbergh 2024), tackling infrastructure choke points, such as low bridges, and reducing bureaucracy around permits for cross-border transport of ammunitions and other dangerous goods. The lack of a mechanism similar to the Schengen initiative (the so called Military Schengen, aimed at streamlining and expediting the rules and procedures governing the movement of military assets within the EU) has already been identified as a challenge by NATO and the EU, as it makes the process of transferring troops and equipment between EU Member States complex and time-consuming. Ironically, the crucial importance of such military corridors and a good argument in the favour of a Military Schengen is the focus of the Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik on the matter, which conjures fears about the past, asserting that "that the last time we had a European Schengen of this sort was Hitler's Germany and it occupied Europe during World War II" (Blinova 2024).

The area of providing the required infrastructure capable of supporting the heavy military transport is also supported by the EU through the Action plan on military mobility 2.0, centered on the need to develop a well-connected military mobility network consisting of:

- multi-modal transport corridors, including roads, railways, air routes, and inland waterways with dual-use transport infrastructure capable of handling military transports;
- transport nodes and logistical centres that provide the required host- and transit nation support and sustainment to facilitate the deployment of troops and materiel;
- harmonised rules, regulations, procedures, and digitalised administrative arrangements;
- enhanced sustainability, resilience and preparedness of civilian and military lift and logistical capabilities (Action plan on military mobility 2.0, 2022).

From a resilience point of view, this is a major step forward, as it sets the framework for investing in dual-use transport infrastructure through co-funding from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) funding instrument and specifically underlines the importance of resilience of the military mobility network, including the transport infrastructure.

Such initiative is of utmost importance, as building and upgrading transport infrastructure is mainly a national matter, but which can benefit in a significant manner from EU cooperation and support. In this respect, the European Union has taken a series of very important steps, such as allocating up to 616 million EUR for 35 military mobility projects to support the transport of troops and equipment along the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), in order to facilitate a better, faster and sufficient response from the European members armed forces to crisis and conflicts outside the EU's borders (EU Commission Mobility and Transport, 2022). In this respect, the EU's trans-European transport network policy (TEN-T) is a crucial tool for the achievement of "coherent, efficient, multimodal, and high-quality transport infrastructure across the EU... comprised of railways, inland waterways, short sea shipping routes and roads linking urban nodes, maritime and inland ports, airports and terminals" (EU Regulation No 1315/2013).

Conclusions

The vulnerability of the national, regional and global transport infrastructure to disruptions, from technical failures to armed conflicts, underscores the far-reaching implications on economic, societal, and military aspects. Consequently, in light of the current trend of increased instability and emergence of multiple and potentially concurrent crises and even wars, the development of resilient transport systems is paramount. The conflict in Ukraine has served as a stark reminder of the

importance of military mobility in operations, but also of the need to enhance the resilience of civilian transport infrastructure, which is vulnerable to military attacks, but also to asymmetric warfare tactics. As a result, NATO and Eu are beginning to take concrete steps in this direction, especially in the framework of the Action Plan on Military Mobility. As an example of new developments in this matter, the EU Commission, together with the EEAS, “will carry out an analysis on how the physical EU military transport network meets the military requirements, in consultation with NATO, with the aim of prioritizing dual-use infrastructure development and funding at the EU level and to ensure the resilience of transport networks (EU Monitor, 2022).

Policymakers should integrate resilience considerations into national security and infrastructure development policies and the enhancement of international collaboration, exemplified by initiatives like the EU's military mobility projects and the trans-European transport network, is crucial for addressing complex challenges. A holistic, whole of society approach to resilience is required, incorporating robustness, redundancy, resourcefulness, and rapidity, underscored by the need for a framework of partnerships between public entities and collaborations between public and private sectors and emphasizing the importance of military cooperation with civilian transportation agencies.

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THE TERMINOLOGICAL CONUNDRUM REGARDING INFORMATION WEAPONISATION

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Abstract: *The phenomenon of information weaponisation has become a pressing challenge of our times, having multiple and pervasive effects with security implications, negatively impacting democratic processes such as elections, and even everyday life within the society. The multitude of terms to express the use of information as a weapon and the information disorder have resulted in a terminological conundrum. Studying the literature, inconsistencies unveiled regarding the definition and usage of key terms. This aspect may pose a problem for people studying the phenomenon, as well as for experts and decision makers, and last but not least the public opinion, since a common understanding and a consistent use of key notions are crucial with regard to acknowledging various types of information manipulation and being able to counter this scourge.*

The current paper has two main research objectives, namely to bring forward and illustrate the inconsistencies identified in the study of the literature regarding the definition and use of key concepts, as well as to provide some possible explanations for the challenges they pose. Thus, the study focuses on the systemic and punctual analysis of the literature, the theoretical and practical intersection related to terminology, and the terminological study problematisation.

Keywords: *information weaponisation; information disorder; disinformation; fake news; misinformation; information warfare.*

1. Preliminary aspects – key information-related concepts and security challenges*

Information has a complexity and dynamics of its own, having a dedicated field of study, i.e. *information science*. Information is designed, disseminated and consumed within the *information environment*, which comprises individuals, organisations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information (CSRC n.d.). This term is used in the field of information technology, in security and defence, but also in communication papers. A more specific term, to a certain extent similar, is the *information ecosystem* (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018; UNESCO 2018; DOMINOES Project n.d.), comprising “all structures, entities, and agents related to the flow of semantic information relevant to a research domain, as well as the information itself” (Kuehn 2023). The information ecosystem, as any other system, can be characterised by disorder. In this context, communication specialists and professional journalists use the phrase *information disorder*¹⁶ (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018; UNESCO 2018; Aïmeur 2023; Aspen n.d.; Bârgăoanu 2021). Information disorder can generate security challenges and even threats that can be multiplied in geometric progression, considering the existence of a multitude of online means of information – news websites and social media platforms (also called Online social networks – OSNs), providing almost instant dissemination of (dis)information.

* A.N.: Thanks to Mrs. Diana-Cristiana Lupu, PhD. for her input in synthesizing findings of the research.

¹⁶ A.N.: Some authors and journals also mention the term *disinformation disorder* (Taddeo, de-Frutos-Torres and Alvarado 2022; Durach, Bârgăoanu and Nastasiu 2020; EastAsiaForum n.d.).

Generally, information can be used as a weapon in two manners, from a qualitative and from a quantitative point of view. The *qualitative* manner refers to manipulating information by using propaganda, disinformation, malinformation and censorship. The *quantitative* manner of weaponising information may be referred to as *infodemic*. Information in huge amounts becomes difficult to digest and also difficult to track down when it comes to its (in)accuracy, thus, it is a manner of promoting disinformation. In these circumstances, distinguishing truth from falsehood has become a difficult task, moreover so when the context entails a high level of unpredictability and fear, which is a characteristic of the present, considering the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing conflicts and wars (e.g. Africa, Western Balkans, Ukraine, the Middle East), as well as the economic crisis. The mentioned phenomenon has led to a *dilution of truth* or *truth decay* (Kavanagh and Rich 2018) which, in turn, affects the credibility of the media, especially social media (Edelman 2024, 43; 53-54; Statista 2024) and, implicitly, of the public discourse. As it can be easily noticed, challenges are present in all the five sectors of security: economic, societal, military, political and environmental¹⁷. Moreover, some of these challenges are interconnected and they need a timely and special address. Out of them, (dis)information-related ones, mainly information weaponisation (CAPS, IRSEM 2018, 36; Espaliú-Berdud 2023), are distinguished as trans-sectoral, taking into account not only their intrinsic nature but also their correlation to the societal sector; this aspect has been highlighted throughout history, being differently expressed, according to cultural development.

Thus, the first recorded propaganda campaign dates as back as year 44 B.C. and was made by Octavian against Anthony (Posetti and Matthews 2018). The ancient famous Chinese military strategist and philosopher Sun Tzu showed that it was not a great skill “to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles”, but “to subdue the enemy without fighting” (Oxford 2017, Tzu n.d.). More recently, the so-called Gerasimov doctrine (Gerasimov 2014, Military Review 2016) refers to a new type of war, going “way beyond the use of military hardware alone”, in other words, “a shift towards the use of non-military means and non-traditional domains, such as youth groups, cyber-attacks, civil media and proxy forces” (Selhorst 2016). In this context, information warfare is considered to be “the starting point of every action now called the new type of warfare, or hybrid war, in which broad use will be made of the mass media” (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2015 apud Giles and Seaboyer 2019, 6). Even much more recently, especially since the 2016 US presidential election campaign, the term *fake news* has been added to the panoply, becoming widely popular nowadays. Therefore, we can see that civil and social media can be used for strategic and military purposes as well, by weaponising information. Moreover, being a cheap resource and having the quality of being rapidly disseminated worldwide, especially by means of the internet, information is efficiently used by state and non-state actors both during wars as well as in peacetime (Burutin 2008 apud Giles and Seaboyer 2019, 10; Jowett and O’Donnell 2014, 4) in order to obtain certain strategic advantages of political, military, economic or other nature. It is possible admitting that any communication is an attempt to influence the receiver/target audience, influence, persuasion, propaganda and manipulation being homogenous (Mucchielli 2016, 191).

Having mentioned the key concepts related to the theme and showing the reasons why they are connected to the security environment, we highlight the fact that the present paper has two main research objectives, namely to bring forward and illustrate the inconsistencies and challenges identified in the study of the literature regarding the definition and use of key concepts, as well as to provide some possible explanations for the exposed challenges they pose. Thus, the study focuses on the systemic and punctual analysis of the literature, the theoretical and practical intersection related to terminology, and the terminological study problematisation.

¹⁷ According to the Copenhagen School approach, belonging to the Constructivist theory of IR (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998).

2. Inconsistencies regarding the definition and use of key concepts

Information disorder and the use of information as a weapon are described by a rich terminology, which is not standardised; thus, we are confronted with a terminological conundrum, marked by both the definition and the use of terms and concepts. We could thus argue that, somehow paradoxically, the disorder of information is reflected in an inconsistent use of some terms related to this phenomenon, which may generate confusion. That is why the rationale behind our study is that, in order to identify and thoroughly understand a particular phenomenon and its implications – in this case, information weaponisation – and also to be able to find means to counter and even to prevent it, one needs to clearly grasp and fully acknowledge the meaning of key-concepts, as well as the relationship between them.

In this context, our view on conceptual and terminology incongruences in the field of information weaponisation, regarding both definition and use, is shared by several scholars (Liew 2007; Aïmeur 2023; Buluc, et al. 2019, 88; Giles and Seaboyer 2019). For example, it is emphasised the “vagueness and confusion commonly associated” with the key terms *data*, *information* and *knowledge*, showing that it “seems to be a lack of a clear and complete picture of what they are and the relationships between them” (Liew 2007). In addition, when referring to NATO terminology related to strategic communications, it is acknowledged that «many concepts and terms [...] are complex, fluid, and “messy” and have a long history of philosophical debate» as particular terms “cause confusion and misunderstanding” (NATO StratCom CoE 2019, 19). Also, in relation with NATO terminology to express “the strategic application of power in the information domain”, some critics observed “a lack of consensus” when it comes to defining all the elements (Brangetto and Veenendaal 2016 apud Giles and Seaboyer 2019, 9).

Under such circumstances, in connection to the objectives of this paper, we observed that most, if not all of the studied literature provides a rather single-angled approach, either from a military perspective or from the lens of communication and journalism. Our opinion is that a proper approach to security studies would be the combination of the two perspectives in order to better understand the phenomenon of information weaponisation. In other words, to understand how influence activities operate within mass-media and social media (subjects of strategic and military interest being reflected within), and how they affect communication. Thus, both the definition and use of related terminology will be briefly analysed.

2.1. Inconsistencies regarding the definition of key concepts

The literature study has revealed that while most definitions are relevant, some of them bear one or more types of drawbacks, contributing to the mentioned conundrum, which are presented as follows.

Circular definitions, exposing one of the four situations:

- A term is defined by itself. E.g.: *information* is “an instance of an *information* type” (NIST 2008, A-4 apud CSRC n.d.).

- A term is defined by another form of the same word. E.g.: *communication* is the act or process of *communicating*, the fact of being *communicated* (Webster 2010); *manipulation*, defined as “the act or practice of *manipulating*” and/or “the state of being *manipulated*” (American Heritage 2016).

- A compound term is defined by one of the terms in its composition. E.g.: “*Information science* is the systematic and scholarly study of a concept called *information*” (Seadle and Havelka 2023).

- Terms are defined with each other. An example is the case of *information* and *communication*. *Information* is defined as “any *communication* or representation of knowledge...”

(NIST 2011 apud CSRC n.d.). On the other hand, *communication* is “the imparting or exchanging of *information* by speaking, writing, or using some other medium” (Oxford Dictionary apud NATO 2017, 1-1). Furthermore, *communications* are “the means of sending or receiving *information*, such as telephone lines or computers” (ibidem).

While this practice of defining terms with each other is useful for describing the relationships between them, in connection to definitions, it is a logical fallacy (Liew, 2007).

Incomplete definitions, omitting part of the meaning of a notion.

An illustration is provided by the term *misinformation*, which is defined by some dictionaries as “incorrect information” (Farlex n.d.); “the act of giving wrong information”; “wrong information” (Oxford U.P. 2024), without mentioning intentionality or purpose; thus, the definition is incomplete and presents an ambiguous character. Since there are many terms expressing different types of incorrect/wrong information, more details are needed in order to understand the full meaning of the concept to be able to distinguish it from others.

Different meanings conveyed to a concept, in other words, a concept that is interpreted and used in different ways.

This situation can be illustrated by concepts such as *fake news* and *infodemic*. For example, *fake news* is reported to having “started to mean different things to different people” (Nakov 2020, 2 apud Aïmeur 2023, 7). *Infodemic*, a clipped term, resulted from the combination of the words *information* and *epidemic* is a derived form of the word *infodemiology*. The term became widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic, following the World Health Organisation reference to it in 2020 (WHO 2020), being defined as “too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak”, causing “confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health” (WHO n.d.). However, there is a current understanding of the term *infodemic* referring to a huge flow of both true and false information on a certain subject spreading rapidly (Dictionary.com 2024), just like a virus, within the society, triggering negative impact not only on the public opinion, but possibly affecting certain industries (Simon and Camargo 2021). Thus, one can see that the term is used as a metaphor, the word *epidemic* in the composition of the term referring to the rapid spread of information and not restrictively to a disease. In fact, the form *infodemic* is generally attributed to David Rothkopf, who used it in 2003, in a short article for *Washington Post* in relation to SARS outbreak. Rothkopf defined the term as “a few facts, mixed with fear, speculation and rumour, amplified and relayed swiftly worldwide by modern information technologies” that affect “national and international economies, politics and even security in ways that are utterly disproportionate with the root realities” (ibidem). As for the word *infodemiology*, according to the quoted study, the author generally recognised to have created it in 2002 is G. Eysenbach. He defined it as «the study of “the determinants and distribution of health information and misinformation”» (ibidem) and also, a few years later, as “attempts at digital disease detection” (ibidem). This example shows us how a word or phrase may come to have an unexpected evolution of its own, to an extent different from what it was intended to mean originally. To be noted, there is another term, to a degree similar to *infodemic*, although not as popular in use¹⁸: *disinfodemic*, simply defined as a “pandemic of disinformation that directly impacts lives and livelihoods around the world”, in the context of COVID-19 (UNESCO n.d.). This term is also used as a metaphor, referring to a context more extended than the disease itself. E.g. “political disinfodemic” (Carley 2022).

Contradictory definitions in reference to an essential characteristic of the notion

In the case of *misinformation*, the meanings attributed to this concept are not merely different, but come into contradiction with one another regarding presence or lack of intentionality. First, there is the definition included above, stating that *misinformation* is simply

¹⁸ A.N.: Google returned about 873,000 occurrences of *infodemic* and 11,600 occurrences of *disinfodemic* (February 2024).

incorrect/ wrong information (Farlex n.d.; Oxford U.P. 2024). Secondly, according to Collins Cobuild Dictionary, *misinformation* is “wrong information which is given to someone, often *in a deliberate attempt* to make them believe something which is not true” (Collins 2024). And thirdly, a Report authored by specialists Wardle C. and Derakhshan H. for the Council of Europe argues that, in the case of *misinformation* “false information is shared, but *no harm is meant*” (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018, 5). In regard to the aspect of intentionality representing the core of the conflicting definitions, *UNESCO Handbook for Journalism Education and Training* states that *misinformation* “is generally used to refer to misleading information created or disseminated *without manipulative or malicious intent*” (UNESCO 2018, 7). As it can be seen, language dictionaries either provide a very general, incomplete definition or attribute intentionality to deceive to the notion, while specialists in communication and journalism specify that there is no intention to manipulate. Moreover, from a linguistic point of view, the prefix *mis-* signifies *wrong, bad, or erroneous, ill, mistaken, incorrect*, entering the formation of words such as: *misunderstanding; misfortune; misspelling; mistreat; mislead* and also *negation or lack of*, as in *mistrust, mistrial; misprint* (Collins 2012; Merriam-Webster n.d.). Misinformation can thus have one of the following causes: “poor journalistic skills [...], the intent to provoke [...], or strong personal conviction in a specific matter (i.e.) partisanship” (Wilke 2020, 45).

Definitions or classifications attributing common meanings or features to various terms

In the literature, there are cases in which a synonymic or partial synonymic relationship is attributed to fundamental concepts. Examples in this regard are *misinformation* and *disinformation*. Moreover, *disinformation* is often equated with *fake news*. It sometimes leads to an interchanged use of these terms, *disinformation* being often substituted with *fake news* or with *misinformation*. In some cases, other terms, as those used in the military field – *information warfare, influence campaigns* and so on, are substituted with *disinformation*. To them, *false news* and *false information* can be added.

Disinformation is “false information ... knowingly shared to cause harm” (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018, 5). As for the pair *disinformation* and *fake news*, the latter is often associated or used instead of *disinformation*, part of the literature putting an equal between the two notions, as some scholars acknowledge (Buluc, et al. 2019, 3).

Of the two, *fake news* has been granted many different meanings in the literature, in the media as well as in the public discourse, especially politics. It is defined as “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting” (Collins 2024). Another definition exposes the ways in which *fake news* is constructed: “manipulation of information that can be carried out through the production of false information, or the distortion of true information” (Aïmeur 2023, 30). A Springer published study of the literature shows that “some consider *fake news* as a type of *misinformation*”, “as a type of *disinformation*”, “while others associate the term with both *disinformation* and *misinformation*” and, additionally, “some prefer to differentiate *fake news* from both terms” (Aïmeur et al. 2023, 7). In a comprehensive glossary published in 2023 by the European External Action Service (EEAS), including over 150 terms related to *disinformation*, *fake news* is defined as “false or misleading information presented as news”, and moreover, two other mentions are made, one regarding its association with *disinformation*: “it can be *inaccurately* used as a synonym of *disinformation*”, and that it “has been popularised by Donald Trump, who exploited it to cast doubt upon credible news” (EU DisinfoLab 2023). This last mention, although is a known fact, could have been eluded, in our opinion, from the definition, as it is not a defining characteristic nor is it objectively and elegantly expressed. As known, *fake news* has been a buzzword; however, reliable scholars, as well as journalists advocate against its use (UNESCO 2018, 14; Wilke 2020, 45, Wardle and Derakhshan 2018, 16), for several reasons. A first argument is that, from

a linguistic point of view, the phrase is an oxymoron, the word *fake* opposing in its semantics the word 'news', which means "verifiable information in the public interest" (UNESCO 2018, 7). In this way, *fake news* challenges the trustworthiness of information that is verifiable and can be labelled as *real news*. Thus, information that does not fulfil these criteria should not be called *news* (ibidem). Moreover, it is considered "inadequate to describe the complex phenomena of information pollution" as the phrase "has become an emotional, weaponised term used to undermine and discredit journalism" (ibidem). Thus, it is recommendable to use the terms *misinformation*, *disinformation* and *malinformation*, these three instances making out the *information disorder*, as suggested by Wardle and Derakhshan (ibidem, 14, 43, Module 2).

From a linguistic point of view, *false* and *fake* are synonyms. However, they are not perfect equivalents. *Fake* is defined as "not what somebody claims it is; appearing to be something it is not; synonym – counterfeit"; "made to look like something else; synonyms – imitation, artificial" (Oxford U.P. 2024) and, also, as "having a *false* or misleading appearance; fraudulent" (American Heritage 2016). As for *false*, some language dictionaries define it as "not correct or true; not natural; not real; wrong/not accurate; not sincere" (Oxford U.P. 2024), while other dictionaries also include intentionality: "deliberately untrue; intentionally deceptive" (American Heritage 2016), "being or intended to be misleading or deceptive" (Collins 2014). So, comparing the meanings of *false* and *fake*, it can be seen that while *false* may include intention or not, *fake* is consistently defined as having a deliberate character. However, in the BBC *Fake news glossary* comprising 18 "top keywords to know", the term *fake news* is included, but *false news* and *false information* are not (BBC n.d.). The same goes for the EEAS disinformation glossary, where there is no inclusion of *false news* or *false information* as a term (EU DisinfoLab 2023).

2.2. Inconsistencies regarding the use of key concepts

Having studied the literature, in relation to information disorder and information weaponisation, we have identified three types of situations of inconsistent use of terms, as follows:

Some terms are used interchangeably, as a result of being attributed common meanings or common features to certain concepts. For instance, *fake news* and *disinformation* are often used in this way. Also, *misinformation* is quite commonly used instead of *disinformation* in mass-media and also in some scholarly articles. Another case is that in which *disinformation* is sometimes used in mass-media to reflect the *information war(fare)*, proliferated by the Russian Federation, especially since 2014 (Giles and Seaboyer 2019, 12).

A wrong form of a word is used in compound terms

An inconsistent use of compound terms relating to and having in their composition the word *information* can be seen in the literature, as well as in mass-media. Specialised compound terms in English related to *information* are built using the noun form. Here are some examples of widely accepted terminology, according to NATO doctrine and international expert-level reports and glossaries: *information capabilities*, *information conflict*, *information domain*, *information environment*, *information infrastructure*, *information operation*, *information security*, *information space*, *information superiority*, *information system*, *information war(fare)* (Godwin III, et al. 2014; NATO doctrine n.d.). On the other hand, the adjective *informational*, signifying "relating to [information] or having the nature of information" (Farlex n.d.), is used in phrases such as *informational measures*, i.e. measures related to information, *informational impact*, *informational influence*. The inconsistent use of some of the mentioned compound terms may reside in the fact that the adjective *informational* is often used¹⁹ instead of the noun *information*.

¹⁹ A.N.: Upon Google search of the syntagm "informational superiority", limiting the query to the field of security, we get over 3,200 results (February 2024)

Disuniform use of correct and wrong term(s) to express a concept within a paper

Within some papers, there can be seen an inconsistent use of both correct and incorrect terms. A very common case refers to misuse of compound terms having in their structure the word *information*. Thus, within a paper, there can be seen usage of both *information war/warfare* and *informational war/warfare* or of other compounds made with the word *information/-al*. As shown, in compound terms, the noun *information* is used. The study has found that terms are also used inconsistently even within a publication belonging to the same author or group of authors. A few exemplifications for the invoked situations are provided in *Table no. 1*.

Table no. 1: Illustrations regarding the inconsistent use of terms

<i>Situation and explanation</i>	<i>Contextual use</i>
Terms used interchangeably: <i>misinformation</i> instead of <i>disinformation</i>	“China Flexes its <i>Misinformation</i> Muscle: Until recently, we found that China rarely used social media to manipulate public opinion in other countries” (Bradshaw and Howard 2019, 2) 1. “Depleted tech platforms, AI-enabled <i>misinformation</i> , and more than 50 countries voting in 2024” (Foreign Policy 2024); 2. “platforms tend to have even less cover outside the West, with major blind spots in local languages and context making <i>misinformation</i> and hate speech not only more pervasive but also more dangerous” (ibidem); 3. “ <i>misinformation</i> shared both privately and publicly – much of it by political parties” (ibidem); 4. “said Sumitra Badrinathan, a professor at American University who studies political <i>misinformation</i> in India” (ibidem)
Disuniform use of correct and incorrect terms within the deliverables of a project, authored by contributors from different countries. Correct use of terms (examples 1-4): <i>information environment</i> ; <i>information warfare</i> ; <i>information space</i> ; <i>information technology</i> <i>information ecosystem</i> Incorrect use of a term (examples 5, 6): <i>informational environment</i>	1. “Conflict and its manifestation in the <i>information environment</i> : hybrid warfare/threats, cognitive and <i>information warfare</i> ” (DOMINOES Project 2023, title); 2. “relatively objective principles such as history, scientific knowledge, and territorial boundaries are being disputed in the <i>information space</i> by revisionist powers” (ibidem, 8); 3. “It uses <i>information technology</i> and the tools, machines, networks, and systems that come with it” (ibidem, 38); 4. “the major impact that digital platforms have on the <i>information ecosystem</i> ” (DOMINOES Project n.d., 11); 5. “The research contained in this handbook focuses on six aspects. The first chapter examines the current trends in the <i>informational environment</i> , the evolution of mainstream media and social media [...]” (ibidem, 2); 6. “The first chapter of the Dominoes Handbook sets out to map the main current developments in the <i>informational environment</i> so as to better understand and lay the foundation for the most efficient and effective means of countering disinformation. (ibidem, 9)
Disuniform use of correct and wrong terms within a paper Correct use of terms (examples 1-5, 7): <i>information warfare</i> ; <i>information environment</i> ;	1. “The development and innovation of military technologies and the professionalization of soldiers are not enough to fight in <i>information warfare</i> ” (Radu 2022, abstract); 2. «The U.S. Department of Defense defines cyberspace as “an overarching domain in the <i>information environment</i> consisting of interdependent networks of <i>information technology infrastructure</i> and user data» (ibidem, 534); 3. “In order to achieve this goal, I suggest 3 other objectives: – analysis of concepts such as cyberspace and <i>information space</i> ” (ibidem, 534); 4. “It has also used

<i>Situation and explanation</i>	<i>Contextual use</i>
<p><i>information infrastructure;</i> <i>information technology infrastructure;</i> <i>information space;</i> <i>information operations</i> <i>information-technological warfare</i> Incorrect use of terms (examples 5, 6, 8): <i>informational; informational confrontation; informational superiority</i></p>	<p><i>information operations</i> outside its territories to spread panic among its opponents” (ibidem, 535); 5. «The Russian Ministry of Defense describes <i>informational confrontation</i> as "the clash of national interests and ideas, where superiority is sought by targeting the adversary's <i>information infrastructure</i> while protecting its own objects from similar influence"» (ibidem, 535); 6. «instead of "cyber", the Russians use the term "<i>informational</i>"» (ibidem, 535); 7. «However, the most important divergence is the term "cyber warfare", or the Russian equivalent "<i>information-technological warfare</i>", which is only part of the concept of "<i>informational confrontation</i>"» (ibidem, 535); 8. «According to Russian cyber researchers, the <i>informational confrontation</i> is ongoing, with Russia using every tactic, technique, and procedure to gain <i>informational superiority</i> in this competition» (ibidem, 536)</p>
<p>Disuniform use of correct and wrong terms to express a concept within a paper: a. Correct term (example 1): <i>information warfare</i> b. Incorrect use of term (example 2): <i>informational war</i></p>	<p>1. “Ukraine conflict: the challenge of <i>Informational War</i>” (Stănescu 2022, title); 2. “Like classic combat in theatres of operations, <i>information warfare</i> aims to destabilize society by bringing information with a strong emotional impact to the fore” (ibidem).</p>
<p>Disuniform use of correct and wrong terms to express a concept within a paper: Correct term: <i>information disorder</i> (examples 1,2) Incorrect term: <i>disinformation disorder</i> (examples 3,4)</p>	<p>1. “Creators and spectators facing online <i>information disorder</i>. Effects of digital content production on information skills” (Taddeo, de-Frutos-Torres and Alvarado 2022, title); 2. “Social media, disinformation, <i>information disorder</i>” (ibidem, keywords); 3. «According to the research “The global <i>disinformation disorder</i>” (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019), there is, in fact, evidence of organized social media manipulation campaigns in 48 countries [...]» (ibidem); 4. «Among the strategies to contrast “global <i>disinformation disorder</i>”, media and information literacy have a pivotal role» (ibidem).</p>
<p>Wrong term to express a concept within a paper. Correct term: <i>information disorder</i>; Incorrect term: <i>disinformation disorder</i></p>	<p>“This is consistent with the role of internet users in the generation and propagation of <i>disinformation disorder</i> (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)²⁰ and confirms their status as prosumers of information, but also disinformation” (Malquín-Robles and Gamir-Ríos 2023).</p>

The examples provided illustrate obviously mistaken use of terms. However, if we think of the associations made between *fake news* and *disinformation* and *misinformation* that we referred to earlier in the paper, misuse of terms would be not as easy to identify.

2.3. Possible explanations for the challenges posed by the misuse of key concepts

Briefly, four main factors have been identified as possible explanations for the inconsistencies exposed, as follows: relatively recent and constantly developing study of the phenomenon; interdisciplinarity; different perspectives when defining certain concepts (historic and cultural aspects are to be taken into consideration); the language factor.

²⁰ A.N. The report of Wardle & Derakhshan does not contain any occurrence of the term disinformation disorder (search performed automatically within the document).

The first factor refers to the fact that information disorder and information weaponisation have only recently become a research corpus. Although influence activities such as propaganda and disinformation have been used since ancient times, the interest in this phenomenon as the object of a field of study has grown since 2014, in the context of the pervasive information campaigns led by the Russian Federation upon annexation of Crimea. Moreover, having in mind the rapid technological progress, the phenomenon of disinformation has acquired new means and modalities of reaching the public, thus making room for new terms to express these aspects. In this context, scholarly as well as expert-level endeavours are necessary in order to define and operationalise some of the working concepts, an idea supported by many researchers in the field who consider that it is natural for the terms related to new phenomena with a multitude of manifestations and many connexions, such as *fake news*, to have a variable, yet not well-fixed definition (Buluc, et al. 2019, 88).

The second factor is interdisciplinarity. From the study of the literature, a first aspect to be mentioned is the rich terminology of this specific field of study, that brings together theories and concepts from various domains, such as communication and journalism, military science, psychology, sociology and information technology (IT), the latter having known an intensive development in the past years, as it includes the cyber component and social networks. Thus, it can be stated that there is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of information manipulation, having in mind its relevance for strategic and military purposes.

The third factor refers to different objectives and perspectives upon defining specific concepts. For instance, definitions can be of several types – conceptual definitions, for scholarly purpose, and merely functional or contextual, for journalistic purpose. Difference of perspectives when defining a term may also refer to dissimilar understanding and usage of a concept, e.g. *information war(fare)* by two schools of thought such as the Western view, to include NATO, as compared to the Russian (Giles and Seaboyer, 2019).

The fourth factor refers to the specificity of each language. As researchers and experts using English as a foreign language develop various forms of papers, they may be under the influence of their native language, or can simply use mistakenly some concepts, as illustrated. Having in mind the discrepant understanding of the meaning of some key concepts and the subsequent inconsistent use of some terms, the relevance of some studies or of specific parts of them may be subject to questioning. Apart from a possible impact on further research in the field by proliferating inaccurate knowledge, it could also have implications on societal security, as a lack in common understanding regarding the specific meaning of key terms may lead to their misleading use, resulting in inappropriate decisions in connection to countering the phenomenon of information weaponisation.

Conclusions

The current study started from the premise that information can be used as a weapon both in wartime and in peacetime. As seen from the analysis, the information disorder has a two-folded nature: on the one hand, there is the multitude of false, fake, manipulated content – each actor wishing to present facts as they best serve their strategic interests, aiming to influence the target audience behaviour, especially by appealing to emotions, and, on the other hand, there are inconsistencies regarding both the definition and use of key concepts. In this respect, the study of the literature revealed interesting and challenging aspects, the paper providing a series of illustrations and examples.

Following the analysis, we conclude that, in the field of security studies, it is necessary to combine the communication and journalistic perspective with the military perspective when it comes to analyse influence activities and discuss related concepts and terminology. Also, we

believe that standardisation of key concepts is essential, as different understandings lead to ambiguous use and even misuse in the mass-media, and in official documents that aim to expose or to counter the phenomenon of information weaponisation. This may also trigger possible consequences for the decision-making process in security-related fields.

Thus, the relevance and usefulness of the discussed aspects regarding terminology is not overstated, having in mind that various forms of disinformation affect the society at large, information being weaponised concerning security-related matters, such as conflicts, wars and electoral processes. Last but not least, standardisation of key concepts related to disinformation and information weaponisation may contribute in creating and consolidating media literacy, as well as the security culture.

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