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SUMMARY

Ethics in the Age of Hybridity

ETHICS AND THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES: LOGIC OF THE GENERAL VS. LOGIC OF THE SINGULAR

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Abstract: *Always present in sociological thought has been the need to understand subjective processes by tracing them historically, following their direction and assigning them a meaning, possibly unambiguous, capable of arriving at a single solution. Weber has a strong sense (conviction) of the irreducible contingency of historical events, and thus of the possibility that even the most enduring and well-established trend lines turn out to be reversible. Simmel (1968) observes that in freedom and equality, subjects today appear as bearers of the objective spirit of culture, but also of a self-centred objective structure of spiritual values. This scholar analyses how historical and social events originate from people's lives, and also how social figures are constructed from the interaction between individuals. The adaptations caused by culture, which tend towards the ideal, at the same time also become the content of life. Weber (1948) attempts to solve the problem of the relationship between ethics and politics by distinguishing two ideal types: the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility. The former strictly follows rights understood as absolutes; the latter, on the other hand, belongs to those whose virtues include a sense of responsibility and foresight (therefore the individual always assesses the consequences of his or her actions). The adaptations that have taken place in sociological theories since the last decades of the twentieth century will be considered. Among others: Elster (1985), for whom there are no societies, only individuals. The individual in today's societies relies on a particular and unrepeatable mixture of individual motivations.*

Keywords: *ethics and politics; ethics of conviction; individual motivations*

1. FOREWORD

Ethics is not only a branch of philosophy, it is also something that enables the ethical behavior of society, which has always existed despite turmoil and wars, to be constructed. Ethical behavior may be considered a 'way of life', i.e. a way of defending life. Mistakenly, the terms 'ethics' and 'morals' are used as synonyms. The word 'ethics' comes from the Greek word *èthos*, identifying the branch of philosophy that analyses the behavior that is considered correct (honest, transparent, responsible), in the sense of following values that are suitable for all circumstances. For the politician, for example, it is about making decisions that promote the common good while avoiding conflicts of interest and forms of corruption. The focus of ethics is on the norms that individuals should use in their daily lives. In addition, ethics, having as its object the moral values that determine the individual's behavior, is also understood as the search for one or more criteria enabling the individual to manage his or her freedom in a fitting and appropriate manner. It concerns man's sense of existence and defines the common morality that the individual should in any case follow[1]. In this sense, morals is the object of study of ethics. Regardless of the origin ascribed to it – from God or Man – it exists because moral norms, which are based on the nature of man, exist in any case. Ethics, therefore, can be understood as a 'normative institution'[2] and as a social one at the same time, because the term 'institution' means something unrelated to the individual. As a 'historical reservoir of meaning', in fact, it exists independently of the subjects who refer to it and it fulfils a social function. Moreover, its normativity pushes individuals to act and to experience positive or negative feelings based on the norms themselves.

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[1] The adjective 'moral' comes from the Latin word *moràlia* meaning 'norms of conduct'. Morals focuses on the relationship between behavior, values and, therefore, the community.

[2] Institutions refer to organised groups or apparatuses that pursue particular goals in a systematic way, following certain rules and procedures. Institutions in this sense are: State, family, school, hospitals, church, economic enterprises, army, judiciary, sport etc.

The objective meaning of social events is made available by 'knowledge resources'. These are collected, experienced in one's body and transmitted by social institutions that are resources embedded in the individual, who applies the sedimented knowledge when acting and living his or her life (Berger &Luckmann, 2010:27). In primary and secondary socialisation, in addition to developing personal identity and understanding how one should act, one assumes his or her own responsibility by 'looking at others'. This is how one forms what G.H. Mead (1996) calls the 'generalised other', which is an ethical construct because the figure of the 'other' is matured by living in society, learning life from others, from the social group to which one belongs.

The 'generalised other' may be understood as a mechanism through which the community gains control over the conduct of individuals. Ultimately, the generalised other is a uniform entity comprising all the sources of authority that we have internalised and that regulate our relationship with reality. The personal act involved in a communication process and its signifying symbols are therefore at the core of the construction of reality through a process of relational experience.

In order to enact ethical behaviours, one has to pursue cross-cultural training, facilitated by an inclusive education, i.e. adapted, one that provides people with equally distributed learning and development opportunities, useful for better understanding the other. Such a situation can be facilitated by 'structuration theory'. According to this theory, the basic domain of study of the social sciences is neither the experience of the social actor, nor the experience of the individual actor, nor even the existence of any form of social totality: this domain concerns social practices ordered through time and space (Giddens, 1986:2). At this stage, the scholar tries to find a synthesis between social and individual forces in shaping reality. According to this theory, the actions of individuals and social structures are intrinsically linked and they influence each other. At the heart of Giddens's thinking is the realisation that just as individual actions are limited by structures, in the same way they also bring about social change. Actions 'act' on the reality that is formed and shapes the actions themselves. Structures, then, are the rules and resources that actors use in practices that produce society itself: structures impose constraints on actions, but at the same time make them possible.

Critics of contemporary culture are convinced that the crises of our time are different from those of the past, as they believe that modernity involves new ways of constructing both the social and the meaning of human life, leading to an unprecedented historical crisis of meaning. Rarely do scholars assume that a radical transformation of the basics of human condition has taken place. This is certainly a suggestive force, although its empirical verification is not possible. In order to better understand the changes that may often be identified as a crisis of meaning, one must consider that meaning is just a complex form of consciousness: it does not exist in itself, but is always in relation to an object (Berger & Luckmann, 2010). Meaning is the certainty that there is a relationship between experiences and actions. The present experience can be related to past experiences, near or distant, to typical forms of experience taken from the social store of knowledge. The meaning of present action is prospective; completed action, on the other hand, has a retrospective meaning. Actions are focused on social institutions that are accumulations, i.e. historical reservoirs of meaning helping to unburden the individual from the need to start over again each time to constantly reinvent the world.

Institutions (see footnote 2) are configurations of superstructures, juridically organised with the purpose of guaranteeing social relations by preserving and making available the meaning of both the individual's actions in the different fields of action and his or her overall conduct of life. Control of the production of meaning is accompanied by control of its transmission: through education or planned indoctrination, the aim is to get individuals to do and think what corresponds to the norms that are accepted and widespread in society.

2. PLURALISM AND THE RULES OF ETHICS

When crises of subjective and intersubjective meaning accumulate in society, to the point of creating a general social problem, the causes can be sought in the social structure and thus in society. When different value systems and/or fragments of different value systems coexist, we have what is called pluralism.

Marcuse *et al.* (1969) understands pluralism as a minimum condition for a modern democracy to function. Weber, who always pays attention to the agent (the one who performs the action),

distinguishes two types of ethics that could be considered opposing positions, although they are not necessarily expressions of different ethics. The scholar thinks that every behaviour can be rational with respect to value, with respect to purpose or with respect to both. This conclusion might seem a contradiction; instead, it stands as a confirmation of the polytheism of values, because it underlines how global society marks the transition from the ethics of conviction to the ethics of responsibility, implying the ability to make just choices where tradition has given way to multiple universes of values (Weber, 1948:56). Thus, justice as an ethical conviction is not enough: an ever more just and therefore more responsible justice must be sought. [3] A politician who follows ethics must make decisions that promote the common good. A politician who follows ethics must make decisions that promote the common good.

The ethics of conviction is driven by passion and follows certain principles that are considered absolute, irreducible and universally valid. Those who practise it think only of the conformity of their actions and not of the consequences of those actions, which relate to a moral order. On the other hand, the ethics of responsibility belongs to those whose virtues include a sense of responsibility and foresight. The outcome is ascribed to the personal actions of the person who does not assume absolute principles, and recognises the polytheism of values without trying to rank them on a hypothetical scale. This implies a duty to always evaluate one's actions according to the principle of rational action in relation to purpose. For Weber, any ethically oriented conduct can oscillate between two maxims that are radically different and irreconcilably opposed. However, he believes that these two approaches are not antithetical, but rather complement each other: only together they make the 'true man', that is, the man who has a vocation for politics, the one who succeeds in combining ends, means and consequences of action by embodying the above virtues (passion, responsibility and foresight). The politician's task would therefore be to mediate diversity, plurality, variety, and turns them into concord. Society should 'do something' so that there is equality of force, otherwise the weaker surrenders. For those in power, what is just is the force that can be exerted to control events, imposing it brazenly with arrogance and denialism.

Leaders must balance their ideological convictions with responsibility towards their voters, considering the long-term consequences of their policies. The ethics of conviction can guide our interactions based on values of fairness and honesty, while the ethics of responsibility pushes us to consider how our actions affect others emotionally.

Through the understanding and application of both ethics, one can aspire to a life that is not only morally consistent, but also socially responsible. Recent words exchanged between heads of state may mark a point of no return: those who have force only know force, and not justice, and they justify force: justice is one thing, justification is another. Pascal[4] says that we call 'peace' what is in reality the capitulation of the weaker: it may be justified, but it is not just. It takes strength to restrain aggression. If we want peace, we must be equals; if the forces are unequal, we move towards servitude or death. The hope for peace is only a force of the heart, because if we do not know how to defend our ideals, the use of violence will reoccur. We tend to live in the abuse of lies. Lies work when there is no knowledge of history. A flock wants a leader[5] and only judges victories as right: if an action is successful, it means it is right!

Pascal's pessimistic (or realistic?) position on the relationship between force and justice is well known. His hope is that these two poles may coexist for the good of man. But in this world justice has no possible way of asserting itself and using force for that purpose, so force inevitably prevails. 'Justice without force is powerless, force without justice is tyrannical'. The French philosopher finally admits with desolation that justice is subject to dispute, might is not: it is easily recognised and undisputed. Thus strength could not be given to justice, because strength contradicted justice and claimed that she alone was just. And since what is just could not be made strong, what is strong was made just (Rigoberto, 2019).

While on the one hand there are (objective) preferences, on the other hand there is an emotional complexity that leverages our attitudes, and therefore our choices, through positive emotions such as pleasure, admiration, joy, euphoria, hope; but also with negative emotions such as contempt, hatred, shame, disappointment, fear, envy etc. Although it is difficult to

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[3] Weber expressed this clearly when he said that in the world, one must always attempt the impossible. But the person who undertakes this task must be a leader and also a hero, in the sober sense of the word.

[4] Blaise Pascal was born in 1623 and died in 1662.
[5] We think of Orwell's novel '1984' criticising the manipulation of hatred and ignorance.

incorporate all these emotions into a model of rationality, it would be irrational not to acknowledge that, during interactions, one must consider the other subject as a bearer of emotional instances. Based on these assumptions, we consider individual preferences to be 'socially' individual, e.g.: reciprocity of intentions, dislike of inequalities, altruism.

3. CONCLUSIONS

More recently, Elster (1985) asks: 'What holds a society together?'. His analysis develops along the lines of rational choice theory within methodological individualism, according to which every social phenomenon is the result of the combination of individual actions, beliefs or attitudes. Thus, there are no societies, only individuals interacting with each other. Envy, opportunism, consistency: these are the dominant factors that determine the actions of the individual, and every society rests on a particular and unrepeatable mixture of such individual motivations. Elster reviews the unpredictable effects of these categories and shows how social norms provide a kind of motivation for action that is irreducible to rationality.

Defending the homeland is the celebration of a ritual: it has value, but no ethical value in itself. It is ethically indifferent whether these values are realised by men, and in the case that they are merely realised, it is completely irrelevant whether a responsible will did it or not. 'Justice done' is always the same, whether it is done through human will or divine judgement; in any case it is not an ethical value, despite its undeniable value, because it is not in the line of responsibility. Now it is the 'I' that struggles to assume or is forced to assume the function of centre of the *Lebenswelt*, the 'world of life'. It is the 'I' that recreates the rest of the world as its own periphery, assigning, attributing and defining an undifferentiated relevance to its parts, according to its needs. The task of holding society together (be it solid or liquid) is made subsidiary, contracted out, or simply becomes part of everyday politics.

In late modernity, the theme of the foreigner becomes more important. It is a multifaceted issue arising from the phenomenon of migration. In his work *Postmodernity and its discontents* Bauman (1997) presents a hermeneutics of the migration phenomenon through the fetish of purity, shedding light on why the topic of migration remains so relevant for contemporary public opinion. The scholar argues that over the course of history only

a few great ideas, ardently professed, have managed to remain innocent in the moment of their implementation. One of these concerns the right to an idea of 'cleanliness', which relates to the vision of an orderly state of affairs to be constructed and protected from all sorts of dangers: real, foreseeable or impossible to foresee. Cleanliness corresponds to a vision of order in which every element must be in its rightful place. However, there are things that do not find an orderly place in any context, and do not fit into the vision of an orderly world. This category of objects that nothing can save or make 'clean' generally includes beings that are mobile because of their nature, capable of moving from one place to another, and thus of appearing without having been invited, let alone expected. They come and move without control, imposing their presence without any regard for the intentions of architects and guardians of order. A foreigner is seen as a chaotic element, therefore representing an element of instability of order. Order means regularity, and an orderly space is an environment in which we recognise, figure out and understand ourselves. The arrival of the stranger causes the standard on which the security of everyday life rests to falter. Each model of purity generates a specific variant of impurity, and each order creates its own categories of people unfit for order and in conflict with it. The foreigner reminds us that efforts for order never suffice in a mobile, fluid and changing world. In a liquid world governed by uncertainty, the presence of the foreigner echoes the idea of poverty: they are an irritating reminder of how vulnerable our position in society is, and of the chronic fragility of our prosperity. In a world where freedom is measured by the range of consumer choices, these new subjects have not achieved freedom. There is no place for them in the consumerist game. They do not add anything to the repertoire of goods, nor do they help to sort out the excess of goods in warehouses (Bauman, 1997).

In today's societies, the individual relies on a particular and unrepeatable mixture of individual motivations. Reckwitz (2020) examines the causes and structures of the social life of 'singularisation' in which we live. What is singular is emphasised, confirming Weber's position concerning the objective spirit that is linked to the lives of individuals – so much so that society is constructed from the interaction between individuals. Such strong presence of individuals as singularities complicates access to an objective spirit, which is always intertwined with the subjectivity of

individuals, but not only: also with the ideals inherent in the two faces of ethics, which prove to be the bearers of the objective spirit of culture. The interaction between subjects generates a situation oscillating between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility. It is precisely this tireless search for balance between the two positions that society can inhabit, without falling into dictatorships on the one hand and anarchies on the other; and it does so by empowering individuals to participate democratically in building a society whose goal is peace.

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EVOLUTION OF RESILIENCE AND HYBRIDITY IN THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL FIELD AND THEIR USE IN CERTAIN ASPECTS OF ARMED SERVICE PRACTICE

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Abstract: *This article aims to analyze how the concepts of resilience, the "strength of a subject to resist traumatic events" (Casula and Don Short, 2006, p.12), and hybridity, the "complexities and dilemmas related to changing globality" (Pawlak, 2015, p.1), are employed in Western military practice for an understanding of the reasons behind increased military training regarding both technical and soft skills, and the wider use of the armed services for non-military purposes such as, peacekeeping and distribution of aid to those afflicted by natural disaster. The first chapter will be a brief excursus on the main models relative to resilience and the second chapter will be a short introduction of the concept of hybridity. The third chapter will take into consideration a body of research carried out by military psychologists in the fields of organization, management, motivation, resilience and hybridity. The article will draw attention to a particularly interesting aspect of recent studies in the sphere of military psychology, that is, an increased valorization of human resources which is no longer solely focused on the individual armed service member but also on the well-being of their family. In other words, the article will show a shift within military organizations; a move from a behaviourist vision to one which is both multi-dimensional and dynamic.*

Keywords: armed service practice; hybridity; resilience; psychology; stress

1. A BRIEF EXCURSUS ON THE MAIN MODELS RELATIVE TO RESILIENCE

In technical sciences, *resilience* is defined as the ability of a material to resist flexural fracture due to impact. The opposite of *resilience* is *fragility,* and this formula can be expressed through the following proportion: the greater the value of the resilience of a given material, the lower the value of its fragility (Bruneau, 2003). Literature often cites the example of bamboo canes, which have a high value of resilience and can resist elevated levels of stress through mechanical compression and traction.

Since the mid-seventies, the term resilience has been introduced progressively into various disciplines related to the well-being of individuals and organizations. In 2014, Banahene *et al.* conducted a review of academic studies which investigated how frequently the term *resilience* was mentioned. Their analysis revealed that between 1991 and 2002, there was a 10% increase in its use, while between 2002 and 2013, an increase of 60%. Essentially, this rise can be put down to the fact that, in academic papers, the word *resilience* was no longer the exclusive prerogative of the technical area but was also in common use in the spheres of psychology and sociology.

Currently, *resilience* is used in psychological studies which have three types of attentional focus: individuals, groups and organizations. One example of an individual approach study, which generally has a clinical psychology approach to *resilience*, is one written by Rutter (1985). Rutter analyzed a sample-group of children born to schizophrenic mothers and demonstrated how 35% of these children did not present any psychiatric disorder, and managed, owing to their resilience, to live healthily, and develop a broad network of relationships. One can find exemplary studies on groups in the psychosocial perspective in Kurt Lewin's *Field theory*:

> Field theory is the term Lewin used for his psychological theory, which examines patterns of interaction between individuals and the total field or the surrounding environments in which they move. The roots of field theory lie both in physics and psychology. According to this theory and following the principles of the Gestalt school of psychology, behavior needs to be evaluated in the right context, taking into account the forces that affect it. (Burnesa & Bargalb, 2017: 5)

In his psychosocial studies of 1995, Emiliani also highlighted that *resilience* develops within the relational dimension of comparison. It is through comparison with other people that an individual is able to evaluate positive and negative behaviour and identify the most appropriate actions to be taken to achieve personal goals.

Exemplary studies in the field of organizations can be those which begin from the concept that an organization is resilient when it has an effective supply chain.

Supply chain studies are based upon the hypothesis that an organization is resilient when its supply chain is flexible, agile and varied. That is, the organization is conceived as a modular design. (Christopher & Peck, 2004; Kleindorfer & Saad, 2005; Klibi *et al.,* 2010; Petty *et al.*, 2010; Rice &Caniato, 2003; Sheffi &Rice, 2005).

In 2004, in the first part of their article, Christopher & Peck report a meta-analysis of literature on the subject and some case studies. Then, in the second part of their paper, they explain their starting hypothesis:

> A fundamental pre-requisite for improved supply chain resilience is an understanding of the network that connects the business to its suppliers and their suppliers to its downstream customers. Mapping tools can help in the identification of 'pinch points' and 'critical paths'.
> Pinch points will often be characterized, as bottlenecks, … critical paths can be long lead-times, a single source of supply with no short-term alternatives and linkages where 'visibility' is poor, i.e. little or no shared information between nodes. (Christopher and Peck, 2014:14)

2. A SHORT INTRODUCTION OF THE CONCEPT OF HYBRIDITY

In the 15th century, the term *hybridity* was used in biology and botany where it designated a crossbreeding of two species which then gave birth to a third *hybrid* spec. In the Victorian period, the racist concepts present in Gobinau's *L'Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines* were widely shared in Western society. Gobinau's legacy offered a moral justification for the acquisition of new colonies (Delatolla & Yao, 2018). In the 19th century, *hybridity* was also used to refer to people of mixed blood and was loaded with negative connotations. For instance, being of mixed blood was viewed as "subversive of the foundations of empire and race" (Nederveen, 1989:361).

In the last few decades of 20th century, for many people, the concept of human hybridity lost its a negative meaning. After the Second World War, numerous colonies obtained their freedom, and the United Kingdom lost a substantial proportion of its empire. In the 1950's, some intellectuals born in former European colonies, embarked upon lines of research known as *cultural study*. These studies lodged strong criticism at the racist Western management of ex-colonies. In 1978, Said published *Orientalism,* which is considered a milestone in the ambit of *cultural studies*. The title of the book refers to the 19th century figurative romantic artistic movement. Through their artworks, the artists of the Orientalist Movement depicted the daily life and landscapes of Far Eastern countries. (Balzano, 1993). According to Said, neither the concept of "Orient nor the concept of the West had any ontological stability; each was made up of human effort." (Said, 2003:xlc)

As Said explained during an interview in 1979, what he was aiming at was worldwide co-operation by means of movements "which oppose the capitalist production mode and try to break its hegemony". In 2011, Guignery wrote:

> In the twentieth century, the term hybridity extended beyond the biological and racial framework to embrace linguistic and cultural areas. Mikhail Bakhtin developed a linguistic version of hybridity that was related to the concepts of polyphony, dialogism and heteroglossia. (Guignery, 2011:2)

The continuous attribution of meta-meanings to the concept of hybridity, by cultural studies, led Joung to observe that "Hybridity is […] itself a hybrid concept", namely, it is not fully applicable to a non-academic world.

Currently, in the press, *hybridity* is used to denote a situation in which two or more different groups must share a single place, even metaphorically speaking, or to refer to different typologies of ideas, technologies and animals, anything which has an influence, either positive or negative, upon something else (Hallin *et al.*, 2021).

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF HELPING THE FAMILY OF THE DEPLOYED ARMED SERVICE MEMBERS

In 2019, a fourth workshop on psychology and psychiatry was held in Rome with contributions from both civilian and military scholars. The theme of this workshop was "Stress, Operations and Resilience" and the topics discussed regarded work

and organizational psychology following the reorganization and reform of the Italian Armed Services and clinical psychology and psychiatry which analyzed potentially traumatic-stressful events and their impact upon armed service members, their families and the armed service organizations. There was also discussion regarding the introduction of figures who could help manage the stress of both the military and their families.

In 2010, Mansfield tested the hypothesis of whether military families who had a member operating in combat areas away from home for a long period suffered from distress or psychiatric phenomena. She compared two sample-groups of military wives: one whose husbands were deployed for lengthy periods, and a second group whose husbands were working in non-operational areas and returned home daily. Mansfield's conclusions were:

> women whose husbands were deployed for 1 to 11 months received more diagnoses of depressive disorders (27.4 excess cases per 1000 women; 95% confidence interval CI, 22.4 to 32.3), sleeping disorders (11.6 excess cases per 1000; 95% CI, 8.3 to 14.8), anxiety (15.7 excess cases per 1000; 95% CI, 11.8 to 19.6), and acute stress reaction and adjustment disorders (12.0 excess cases per 1000; 95% CI, 8.6 to 15.4). 27.6), 18.7 excess cases of anxiety (95% CI, 13.9 to 23.5), and 16.4 excess cases of acute stress reaction and adjustment disorders (95% CI, 12.2 to 20.6). (Mansfield, 2010:101)

In 2013 McGene published a detailed review on the factors which can trigger distress and the type of support appropriate for treating the onset of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and on the diagnosis of PTSP itself. McGene stated:

> We have identified social support as a central element of social fitness and have reviewed prior research on the key sources of social support and its influence on well-being… We have reviewed the factors that facilitate or obstruct positive social support and have made recommendations for promising interventions that can increase the facilitation of support. Our review has shown the importance of families, friends, co-workers, unit members, neighborhoods, and other communities for the provision of emotional, instrumental, and informational support… (McGene, 2003:29)

In 2022, Sylvia's study confirmed literature previously dealing with this topic. Under the heading "Combat Disorders/diagnosis", there are 448 articles in PubMed which regard stress and PTSD, and which are relevant to the years between 1968 and 2024. Starting from the mid-90's, the statistical data concerning stress and PTSD are similar and can, therefore, be considered highly predictive. In accordance with the data expressed by Mesfeld's research and in literature in general, the World Health Organization (WHO) Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 report highlighted that:

> Integrated and responsive care: Integrate and coordinate holistic prevention, promotion, rehabilitation, care and support that aims at meeting both mental and physical health care needs and facilitates the recovery of persons of all ages with mental disorders within and across general health and social services … through service user-driven treatment and recovery plans and, where appropriate, with the inputs of families and carers. (WHO, 2013:15)

The WHO indication suggests that in the event of the onset of mental disorders or pathologies, often associated with deployed soldiers and their families, an institutionalization of a support caregiver service can provide psychological relief. Should caregivers assist families, their help can facilitate the management of distress factors and provide relief. This will allow a military family to help a returning armed services member after a long period of deployment abroad. This would establish the best practices to be employed when offering *integrated and responsive care*.

Several studies have linked the resilient reintegration process with the process of emotion regulation and specifically with three components: coping, appraisal and positive emotions, considered responsible for the ability to adapt positively to stressful events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Scherer *et al.*, 2005; Fredrickson, 2001). Since the homeostatic balance is constantly disturbed, individuals are called to carry out a series of evaluations in their daily lives and to find adequate, selective and finalized strategies and operational responses. For this reason, when faced with an adverse and/or destabilizing event, psychological mechanisms are activated: appraisal consists of the cognitive evaluation of the stressful event, coping refers to operational responses and includes a series of behavioural strategies which can be implemented to handle both the environmental demands and internal needs of the individual.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991,

European armed services in the 1990's underwent structural reorganization, that is, smaller armed service groups were made up of well-trained professionals with effective equipment, logistics, and shared intelligence. The fulfillment of the armed services' commitments changed; from a force of defence to protect national borders, attention shifted predominantly to joint commitments in international tasks both of war and peacekeeping as well as to aid for the population in the event of natural calamity.

All these elements allowed both civil and military psychology to enter military organization fully, and led to the creation, when possible, of adequate programs to provide help to armed service members and their families in times of difficulty. There are, however, possible issues which may hinder the introduction of *integrated and responsive care,* and these generally arise due to limited funding.

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MILITARY ETHICS, GENDER, AND WARFARE

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Abstract: *This paper explores the intersection of gender, military ethics, and hybrid warfare, emphasizing the erosion of women's rights in modern global conflict settings. It critically examines shifts in U.S. and Russian leadership approaches to gender equality, particularly within military institutions. Drawing on international legal frameworks such as jus ad bellum, jus in bello, and jus post bellum, it highlights the ethical obligations in wartime conduct. Through case studies, including the war in Ukraine and historical perspectives from World War II, it reveals the persistent use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and the underrepresentation of women in military leadership and peacebuilding efforts. The author advocates for a redefinition of military ethics to reflect current geopolitical realities and promote gender-inclusive conflict resolution policies.*

Keywords*: military; ethics; gender; hybrid*

1. INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000. This is the first resolution approved by the Security Council that directly addresses the impact of war on women and the role of women in conflict resolution and the establishment of sustainable peace. More than 100 member states have adopted national action plans for the implementation of this Resolution, with some already reaching their 5th NAP. Over 30% of these have expired since 2022 (Peace Women) or even earlier.

The events of recent years have shown that not only have we failed to make progress toward achieving gender equality and equity, but we have regressed. The erosion of women's rights around the world is alarming. I believe that the new U.S. administration has taken drastic measures to change the way democracy is understood.

The decision to pardon those who attacked the Capitol—at his influence—along with the declaration of a state of emergency at the Mexican border, the deployment of troops, and the intention to build a wall there, the revocation of visas including green cards for various individuals without judicial rulings, the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico, the symbolic annexation of Canada as a U.S. state, and the stated desire to annex Greenland—these are just a few examples. Let's not forget the so-called peace consultations with Russia. And this is far from the end.

He also withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement[1], reaffirmed national energy interests, and appointed individuals loyal to his administration to key positions. According to Forbes estimates, Trump's second Cabinet collectively holds $464 billion (Albu & Gyenge, 2025) in assets.

The Department for Government Efficiency—a consultative institution led by Elon Musk (neither elected nor confirmed by Congress)— is making decisions to lay off thousands of employees without clear criteria, and is canceling funding programs on which the health of thousands of people depends. What particularly caught my attention was an aggressive move to eliminate diversity and equity parameters from all state-funded policies and programs. One of the most notorious early decisions, taken on the very first day of the new term, was the dismissal of the U.S. Coast Guard Commander, Admiral Linda Fagan, without any official explanation—only speculation from anonymous State Department representatives.

Another consequence of the "denouncement" of diversity is the rejection of the principles of

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[1] An international treaty adopted in 2015 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21), with the main objective of combating climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

diversity, equity, and inclusion within the military, which has led to the suspension of training courses aimed at preventing sexual harassment across various branches of the armed forces (Queally & Sharp, 2025).

The efforts made by women in the U.S. military have been a revelation and marked a turning point in the field. Many of the actions taken by veterans' associations have been at the forefront compared to what we were familiar with in Romanian society, particularly in the military sector. What stood out to me was the active involvement of veterans in supporting active-duty personnel. One example that I find especially meaningful is a uniform lending system created by a female veteran. This system allows pregnant servicewomen to borrow uniforms adapted to different stages of pregnancy, ensuring they have the necessary equipment without added financial or logistical burden.

It was a great disappointment for me when I read about the opinion of the new Secretary of Defense regarding the presence of women in combat positions (The Economist, 2025)—the very same person who has been accused of rape and reportedly paid a settlement to the individual who made the accusation (Mayer, 2024).

The beginning of Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's term was marked by a focus on "meritocracy" rather than on diversity, equality, or equity. One of the consequences of this shift was the removal (Copp *et al.*, 2025) of photographs from U.S. Army social media pages and websites that celebrated the achievements of women and minorities in the military.

Additionally, the appointment of Phil Hegseth's younger brother as liaison officer (Copp, 2025) from the Department of Homeland Security to the Department of Defense raised eyebrows. It was an unusual—and arguably controversial—decision, viewed by many as a clear conflict of interest.

All these actions remind me of how the discourse, legislation, and the studied appearance of Putin changed once he became the president of the Russian Federation. I refer to his images with a bare chest, swimming in freezing waters, wearing a black karate belt, riding horses, through which he promoted a virile and combative image. For martial arts practitioners, it is well known that the secret of the sport lies precisely in practicing it calmly and lucidly. I connect these references with how Putin decriminalized (in 2017) domestic violence, where offenders risk only 15 days in prison. Additionally, they can escape with a fine or community service if the act (the beating) does not leave visible marks, does not require medical attention, and happens no more than once a year. What is surprising is how this permissive legislation is supported not only by women's rights activists but also by ultra-conservatives, given that every 40 minutes, a woman dies due to domestic violence.

In my opinion, all these appearances were actions from a large plan to prepare for the invasion of Ukraine and to pave the way for the brutalization of men to be capable of the atrocities committed against the civilian population. Thus, the Trump II administration aims to make the U.S. military more efficient through aggression, with the first measures being the elimination of "disruptive factors" in combat and actions promoting equity and equality. I believe the effects will also be seen in civil society through increased aggression towards women, migrants, and LGBTQ groups. However, I don't think this will be a problem for them, considering Elon Musk's opinion (Wolf, 2025) on empathy as the "suicide of Western civilization." We are thus witnessing an attempt to deeply change the ethics in international relations.

2. WARS AND ETHICS

2.1 Defining key concepts. According to the DEX (Romanian Dictionary), ethics is a feminine noun that means: (1) The theoretical study of the fundamental principles and concepts in any field of intellectual considerations (thought) and practical application or action and (2) A set of norms by which a human group regulates its behavior to distinguish what is legitimate and acceptable in achieving its goals (synonym: morality).

Military ethics has two components: in peacetime and during armed conflict. Thus, in peacetime, Military ethics regulates conduct in the service relationship within military structures. For this article, we will refer to ethics in the context of armed conflicts.

When referring to hybrid warfare, it combines elements of traditional warfare with non-traditional forms, such as cyberattacks, informational warfare, and economic sanctions, where combatants can be both civilians and military personnel, and the front is most often dispersed across the physical, digital, and cognitive spaces.

2.2 Integrating gender perspectives in the military ethics. Given the intersection of the civil and military spheres in the context of hybrid

warfare, the introduction of a gender perspective in the military is very important. Gender dynamics are a critical element, yet often overlooked in military ethics, especially in the context of hybrid warfare. The gender perspective is not just about women in the military; it's about how gendered power influences decision-making processes, leadership, and military actions.

It is important to consider how traditional roles of men and women in the military have changed, as well as the recent shifts in these roles (including the integration of women in various positions and functions).

Gender norms shape military culture, which has historically been male-dominated, influencing decision-making from an ethical perspective, military training, and the use and perception of new technologies. The increasing participation of women in the military, both in combat and in positions of power, has changed traditional gender norms at both the civil society and military levels. The growing involvement of women has brought new perspectives on military ethics and can influence the way ethical dilemmas in hybrid warfare are addressed.

Analyzing military ethics through a gender lens is essential for understanding the complexities of modern warfare. Gender influences not only the experiences of those engaged in combat but also the ethics of how conflicts are conducted, how decisions are made, and how military policies are shaped in hybrid warfare.

2.3 The Laws of War. As we learned in the course of this paper, every military conflict is morally assessed based on a theoretical framework consisting of three major sets of principles: *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello*, and *jus post bellum*. It is important to keep in mind that, even in the case of armed conflicts, we must not confuse the legal domain with the ethical domain. There is a possibility that what military ethics considers immoral may also be illegal under international law.

The principles of *jus ad bellum* govern the decision to go to war. The theory asserts that any decision to initiate war must support a just cause, but this is defined very strictly, whether it concerns a civilian population in danger of genocide or a blatant violation of international law. In addition to this restriction, the decision to go to war must also meet several other important conditions: (1) The war must be proportional, meaning its effects must not be worse than the harm it seeks to prevent; (2) The War must be the last resort. All means of

dialogue must be exhausted before the decision to go to war is made; (3) The War must be declared by a politically legitimate authority; (4) The War must be waged with correct intentions; any other motives, whether political or economic, that lead to this decision outside the declared cause, make the war unjust.

The principles of *jus in bello* govern how the war is conducted and aim to limit, as much as possible, the losses of war, whether human, animal, or material. In the ideal battle, civilians are not affected at all, hostilities end quickly with minimal casualties, even among combatants, and those who surrender have all their rights and freedoms respected. In short, it involves three fundamental principles: discrimination, proportionality, and minimal force.

Discrimination refers to the absolute obligation of any army to avoid any innocent casualties. The fundamental distinction here is between combatants and non-combatants, statuses that are gained or lost depending on the role individuals play in the conflict. It is legal and morally permissible to use force against armed civilians, but not against unarmed soldiers. Also, a journalist with a weapon in hand is considered a combatant and can be a legitimate target.

Proportionality in this case does not consider the effects of the war in general, but rather the effects of each strike. These must constitute a proportional response to the enemy threat.

Minimal force requires all those involved in a military conflict to use the weakest destructive capabilities possible in achieving their objectives, and it is a logical consequence of the first two principles mentioned.

2.4 Modern Laws of War. The modern laws of war, established through international treaties such as the Geneva Convention (1949) (*Știri de Cluj*, 2022) and its additional protocols, stipulate that in an armed conflict, unnecessary destruction is prohibited; attacks must be limited to military objectives; indiscriminate attacks (targeting civilians and soldiers alike) are forbidden; wars should be limited to achieving the political objectives that triggered the conflict, and medical personnel, ambulances, and hospitals must not be attacked.

Additionally, the Protocol establishes: (1) The principle of proportionality prohibits attacks where civilian losses would be excessive about the military objective; (2) The principle of precaution governs the precautionary measures that must be taken before attacking a military target; (3) The

principle of humanity prohibits causing any suffering, harm, or destruction that is not necessary to achieve the legitimate goal of a conflict.

The *jus post bellum* principles as a concept appeared more recently in the ethics of war, particularly after the failure of the United States and its allies in administering the occupied territories of Afghanistan and Iraq. These principles regulate actions after the fighting has stopped, such as the types of policies that can be imposed on the defeated or the obligation to build a post-war order in such a way as to prevent future conflicts.

The sets of principles presented are conceptually independent from each other. Thus, in theory, just wars can be fought using unjust means, just as unjust wars can be conducted impeccably. Each aspect of a war can be analyzed separately. For example, no matter how justified a military action may be, if civilian targets are bombed on a large scale, these actions are considered war crimes, meant to terrorize the civilian population. Such military actions from World War II could not be judged in a court of law (not even in the case of Axis powers), as there was no international legal framework at the time. The deadly effectiveness—but also the tactical uselessness—of aerial warfare against civilians was already recognized during the war itself.

These rules are universal, meaning all states or military formations must abide by them. Their role is not to stop war, but to minimize human suffering. If the rules of war are not respected, states or individuals can be accused of war crimes. These rules also apply to militias and volunteer corps that cumulatively meet the following conditions[2]: are led by a person responsible for their subordinates; have a fixed and easily recognizable distinguishing sign from a distance; carry arms openly; and comply in their operations with the laws and customs of war.

The first documented international conviction for rape occurred in 1474, when Peter von Hagenbach, who had served the Duke of Burgundy, was executed. The knight and his troops had terrorized the civilian population for years, including through acts of rape. A court composed of 28 judges, convened by the Archduke of Austria, sentenced von Hagenbach to death, although he defended himself by claiming he was only following orders. The case is significant as it represents the first documented trial of an officer held accountable for the actions of the troops under his command, and the first case where a military leader was convicted for gender-based violence committed by his troops (Oksanen, 2024:32–33). During the American Civil War, lawyer Franz Lieber modernized the state's legislation regarding the rights and duties of the Union army. The "Lieber Code", as it was known, came into force in 1863. It required the army to treat civilians humanely, prohibited torture as a means of warfare, and explicitly banned the rape of civilians—an offense punishable by death (Oksanen, 2024:33). Even more than 500 years later, there is still a notable lack of progress in this area, despite efforts to adopt international regulations protecting civilians in armed conflicts.

The lack of political will to implement international treaties, shown by the lenient treatment of these acts, the covering up of offenses, and victim-blaming, is highly prevalent in today's conflicts. In addition to the war initiated by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, we can mention the Gaza conflict, conflicts across the African continent, and the Balkan conflict. Even more disturbing are the reports of extreme sexual violence, including in front of children, with women being burned, shot, or stabbed in the genital area with bayonets (as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo). There have even been documented cases of rape against children at increasingly younger ages.

2.5 The rape as Weapon of War. The modern laws of war, established through international treaties such as the Geneva Convention (1949) (*Știri de Cluj*, 2022) and its additional protocols, stipulate that in an armed conflict, unnecessary destruction is prohibited; attacks must be limited to military objectives; indiscriminate attacks (targeting civilians and soldiers alike) are forbidden; wars should be limited to achieving the political objectives that triggered the conflict, and medical personnel, ambulances, and hospitals must not be attacked. The first modern convictions for rape as a war crime were handed down in 1998 by the International Criminal Tribunal for crimes committed in Rwanda (United Nations, 2025). The development of international legal instruments and a better understanding of the consequences of sexual violence were also shaped by the genocide trials related to the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Darfur (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2025).

However, the low number of convictions reflects not only a lack of political will but also the

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[2] Regulations concerning the laws and customs of war on land, Hague, 18 October 1907, art.1

distorted way in which sexual violence is treated. Given the small number of women in politics and the armed forces, sexual violence is not considered as serious a war crime as others, nor one that reliably leads to conviction. Trials are expensive and lengthy, and proving rape in court is complicated. As a result, only cases with clear chances of conviction are pursued. This reflects a matter of choice and allows many perpetrators to escape justice entirely.

Unlike other genocidal acts, proving sexual violence requires the collection of evidence very shortly after the act is committed—something that often must happen during wartime, not after hostilities cease, as is common with other war crimes.

In the case of the war in Ukraine, it is for the first time that trials against rapists are occurring concurrently with the armed conflict. Criminal patterns have evolved, and investigators now use updated frameworks to categorize war crimes. Ukrainian citizens have been trained and informed about which types of evidence are admissible in court. At the civil society level, volunteer organizations have emerged to offer support, such as counseling for survivors, forensic evidence kits, and more (Oksanen, 2024:35). In general, civil society has been better prepared to support survivors of sexual violence and bring perpetrators to justice. One example is the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, created in 2016, with headquarters in The Hague and offices in the Central African Republic, Ukraine, and Burundi.

Lessons learned from the Russian Federation's war in Ukraine highlight the need for the presence of women in professions such as medicine, journalism, and the judicial system. Their presence is essential in the processes of treating, investigating, and prosecuting sexual crimes (Oksanen, 2024:36). Female victims are more likely to open up to other women; women are more attuned to the signs of sexual assault and tend to take them seriously. Moreover, female prosecutors and judges are often better equipped to ask the right questions in such cases.

It is true, however, that in Romania, there have been cases where female judges have downplayed the seriousness of rape by invoking supposed consent when the victim was a minor and the perpetrator an adult. In such cases, this isn't about misunderstanding—it's about favoring the aggressor, for one reason or another.

Holding perpetrators of sexual violence accountable is a vital step toward justice for victims. Civil society pressure and the engagement of democratic states play a critical role in this. One example is the case of Japan's wartime sexual slavery (Kageyama, 2019): the involvement of the state was documented, and although only a few survivors remained, they—and their descendants—received some form of compensation.

This raises a pressing question: can we sympathize with conscripted soldiers during wartime? Most of the time, the nature of the war reflects on them as individuals. Jeff McMahan, professor of moral philosophy at Oxford University (Itskova, 2023), who studies the ethics of war, argues that soldiers can sometimes be excused—they should not automatically be viewed as evil criminals unless they commit atrocities, such as those seen in Ukraine.

According to McMahan, Russian soldiers were misled by their government about the war's legitimacy (e.g., that Ukraine posed a threat to Russia or persecuted ethnic Russians). As in many other cases, this shows a dangerous absence of critical thinking. It's important to analyze facts rather than blindly accept political narratives. It's a harsh but necessary perspective.

This mislead is not unique to Russian soldiers—it applies to all wars. Soldiers are often deceived, pressured, manipulated, and coerced. In many ways, they too are victims. However, the same cannot be said for political leaders who start wars, orchestrate the killing of innocent people, and persist in lying while claiming moral high ground—they are the real war criminals.

While I agree with McMahan regarding the manipulation of soldiers and the pressure they face, their actions against civilians—rapes, torture, child abductions, and robbery—are inexcusable. What is even more incomprehensible in our technological age is how some soldiers called home to ask their wives for permission to commit rape. This reveals that they were fully aware of the horror of their actions and feared the judgment they would face later. They sought validation and accomplices.

During World War II, the subject of "military rape against civilians" was also documented, particularly during the Soviet occupation of Berlin. Random rapes, home invasions, and raiding—alongside the humiliation of civilians—became unbearable. The atrocities committed by the Red Army came within extreme famine. After the initial euphoria of victory, rape reached another level: high-ranking officers sought out "comfort women" who would engage in sexual relations exclusively with them in exchange for food and protection.

Two books written by women stood out to me in this regard. The first, *War's Unwomanly Face* by

Svetlana Alexievich, and the second, *A Woman in Berlin*—an anonymous diary later attributed to Marta Hillers.

These two books should be read for what they are: collections of personal stories, recounted by female protagonists. In the first book, their voices were curated by a journalist; in the second, the material was shaped by the very woman who experienced it. The main difference lies in the time between the events and the retelling—Alexievich's work was published decades later, in 1985, and memory may have softened or altered details. Marta Hillers' account was recorded in real time. These two books show us the face of war from a woman's perspective that differs from a man's point of view.

Svetlana Alexievich, a journalist with Belarusian roots on her father's side and Ukrainian on her mother's, experienced the war through her family's history. She interviewed dozens of Soviet women veterans of WWII, aiming to uncover how they felt during the war, not just what they did. Her work took ten years to complete. Some parts were self-censored, others cut by state censors. A revised edition later restored the full content. Though Alexievich won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2015, the book is emotionally intense. I could empathize deeply with these women, victims of both Soviet propaganda and rigid family and social customs. They went to war unprepared, in missions where human life was expendable.

Alexievich understood that war was even harder for women due to gender roles. Men are raised from childhood to fight, while women are not psychologically prepared for violence. Women don't want to die, let alone kill—because women give life (Galaicu-Păun, 2016). As the author herself stated, the book is not about war, but about the human being in war, not the history of war, but the history of emotions (Alexievich, 2023:15).

Many of the interviewed women had served as instructors, medics, snipers, gunners, anti-aircraft commanders, and engineers. After the war, they became accountants, lab technicians, teachers—but the roles never overlapped, they said. In one interview, a former aviator refused to recall her wartime experience, saying:

> I can't… I don't want to remember. I was in the war for three years... and for three years I didn't feel like a woman. My body was like a corpse. I didn't menstruate, and I had no feminine desires. And I had been beautiful… (Alexievich, 2023:12–13)

Alexievich's interviews reveal that women remember war differently—it has a smell, a color, it's filled with everyday details. Many developed an aversion to the color red, to butcher shops, to red fabrics. Some made skirts from old rucksacks.

> At the enlistment office, I walked in wearing a dress; I walked out wearing trousers and a shirt. They cut off my braid and left just one lock on my forehead.
> The Germans shot up the whole village and left. When we got there, the ground was yellow sand… and on it, a child's little shoe.

Her project faced resistance from male writers and even the relatives of the women she interviewed. Husbands would instruct wives:

> Tell it the right way! No tears, no womanly nonsense like wanting to be pretty or crying when they cut your braid.

The book also explores people's inner conflict about learning the truth about their leaders. Many believed in Stalin, loved him, even as they lived under intense indoctrination and fear. One interviewee said:

> We marched like fools, lied to, believing in no one… Where are our planes, our tanks? Everything that flies and rolls and roars—it's all German.

The war changed people. A woman still considered beautiful recalls killing four German prisoners in a moment of crisis. Elsewhere, a man briefly mentions the existence of "campaign wives" in the Red Army—women who fulfilled other roles and paid the ultimate price.

Women returned from the front were often shamed and ostracized, blamed for their wartime service. Families rejected them, men no longer wanted to marry them. Other testimonies include accounts of gang rape, cannibalism, infanticide (Alexievich, 2023:34–35). Stalin even issued an order forbidding Soviet soldiers from surrendering—those who did were labeled traitors (Alexievich, 2023:31–32).After the war, women faced further hardship—no jobs, no money, no food rations. They faced sexism and discrimination. Many never spoke about what they experienced, never wore their medals, which were smaller than the men's anyway (Alexievich, 2023:138–142).

The author did not intend to write a critical analysis of the USSR. She didn't aim to correct the effects of propaganda, nor would she have

succeeded. Her work preserves a raw, poetic oral history of women's youth. Few things have changed since. Alexievich recorded those memories honestly. Still, one might ask: are these stories genuine, or shaped by decades of propaganda and self-justification? (Ioniță, 2019)

"A Woman in Berlin", later revealed to be by Marta Hillers, is a book that hits you viscerally. Like Alexievich's, it took me days to finish. I needed to cleanse my body, soul, and mind. The book focuses on two months in Berlin after the Red Army's arrival. The main character is an educated, nonconformist woman who had worked in publishing and knew some Russian. She had been posted to Russia for a time.

The diary begins on the first day of the Russian invasion—she is already hungry, and hunger becomes a constant theme (Anonima, 2018:12). The book details how Berliners prepared for the invasion and the tension between Nazi Party members and regular people. As Russian troops advanced, life moved into shelters, while homes were used only during daylight. People faced shortages of food, electricity, and water. Tragedy became routine—only high body counts made headlines.

With the arrival of the Russian soldiers, the pace changed. Random, mass rapes began—no woman or girl was spared. Some were hidden in false walls; others disguised themselves as the elderly. Women began to share experiences and help one another heal. Rape lost its initial horror and became a collective experience—which is terrifying in itself. The few men left in the community heard through the walls as women were raped next door.

Eventually, women sought protection from a single soldier in exchange for food—this was survival. Still, they faced judgment for "giving in" too soon. But in such circumstances, who has the right to judge? Certainly not men, many of whom had to tell their wives or daughters, under threat of gunfire: "Go with them.". Nor women—unless they too have faced such a collective fate. It's easy to judge from safety. The protagonist reflects that all she suffered was a kind of retribution for the atrocities committed by the Germans in Russia. It is estimated that 110,000 women were raped in Berlin; about one in five became pregnant, many resorting to abortion.

There is evidence of mass rapes committed by other Allied forces—French and American soldiers included (Myers Feistein, 2018). German politicians and scholars often avoided investigating these acts, not wanting to seem disloyal to the occupying authorities. As a result, the women never received justice.

In Romania, women faced similar horrors. With most men conscripted or sent to forced labor, women were left alone and became victims of abuse by all troops passing through—Romanian, Hungarian, German, Soviet—regardless of ethnicity (Bucur & Miroiu, 2019, p.64). A significant number of looting and rape incidents by Soviet troops after August 23, 1944, were recorded in the archives of Hunedoara County—most of which remain unpunished (Guță, 2015).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Although I did not intend to present the entire spectrum of hybrid warfare, I have tried to highlight how international treaties can prevent abuses against civilians. As we have seen, it is an old practice that, after World War II, led to the regulation of the international legal framework aimed at sanctioning these acts. As we have observed, in the contemporary world, the ethics of military personnel is an important concern for the organizations they are part of.

Many defense ministries (including Romania's Ministry of National Defense) have adopted codes of conduct based on universally known principles such as integrity, legality, objectivity, equal treatment, competence, transparency, loyalty, and the priority of public interest. Unfortunately, in today's world, especially in the context of armed conflicts, these principles are no longer respected. For example, the principle of legality is increasingly violated through the disregard for international humanitarian law (as seen in the wars in Ukraine and Gaza).

Recent events show that other principles, such as loyalty or the priority of public interest, are also violated. How else can we talk about loyalty and the priority of public interest when an active military, during parental leave, signs a contract with a private security company and engages in a form of mercenary activity?

Last but not least, the principle of integrity is compromised by military personnel who go on international missions (especially under the UN) and commit acts within the spectrum of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). Even if investigations reveal that these acts are not criminal by nature, the ethical issue remains.

Unfortunately, both national bodies and relevant international organizations are only at the beginning in terms of preventing violations of military ethics and sanctioning such acts. A step in

this direction was made by the UN, which has taken the measure of banning military personnel involved in SEA acts from participating in future missions under its aegis.

However, although the UN Charter (Bulgac & Sîrbu, 2019:20) stipulates the obligation of states to "refrain, in their international relations, from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other way inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations," one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council is the Russian Federation, which has veto power within this organization. The organization's ability to adopt resolutions detrimental to the Russian Federation is virtually impossible.

This highlights the need to amend the UN Charter, reconsider the necessity of permanent members, and adopt a more ethical principle for the entire Security Council — even if this requires changing the current structure, which would necessitate the consensus of all permanent members. Although the timing may not be ideal given the current international environment, it is important to keep the discussions in this field ongoing.

I believe it is crucial for military institutions, both nationally and internationally, to adapt the legal framework governing military ethics to current realities, blending traditional methods of warfare with its evolving forms to remain both relevant and effective. I propose greater coordination among international organizations to ensure that military personnel involved in SEA-related actions are excluded from participating in any future missions under their auspices.

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METHODOLOGIES FOR ASSISTING VETERANS WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS SYNDROME IN NATO COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *In Romania, there are officially only 19 soldiers diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to an official statement from 2018. PTSD affects between 5% and 18% of the personnel who participated in the same NATO missions as the Romanian military. Starting from an official estimate according to which over 55,000 soldiers participated in foreign missions after 1990, PTSD could affect between 2750 and 9900 of the total Romanian participants This severe underdiagnosis of PTSD had as its main cause the lack of a specific regulatory framework for the protection of veterans in theaters of operations, which would define this condition and recognize it as a source of mental disabilities in veterans in theaters of operations. With the appearance of law 168/2020 and the application rules (in the Ministry of National Defense in February 2021 and in the Ministry of Interior in March 2021) opens the way to real diagnosis of PTSD cases and protection of veterans' rights, provided there is an adequate institutional framework. This paper presents how NATO armies have organized the assistance of veterans with PTSD, with focus on clinical psychology interventions.*

Keywords: *post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); intercultural context; veterans*

1. THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The participation of the Romanian military personnel abroad in counter-terrorism, peace-support or humanitarian-aid missions (which, in most cases, fall into the category of "veteran from the theaters of operations") began in 1993 and continues at present. More than 55,000 troops were involved in the missions accomplished before the COVID-19 pandemic. In all these years (1993-2020), at least 1,500 people per year were involved and they were assigned missions in at least three different locations on the world map. A "real-time" situation of the missions in which the Romanian military and currently deployed forces are involved can be followed on the page https://misiuni.mapn.ro/. Deployment to a theater of operations equates to conducting complex, high-risk missions and exposure to extreme hazards that may leave visible and invisible injuries. A number of 30 servicemen lost their lives, and another 177 servicemen were very seriously injured in the theaters of operations, most of them being classified as disabled. Unseen wounds acquired as a result of exposure to potentially traumatic events have led to the emergence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other comorbid conditions.

The research carried out in various partner countries (with which Romania participates in the same missions, in the same theaters of operations) shows that between 5% and 18% of all military personnel participating in military operations meet the diagnostic criteria for disorders associated with trauma and stress factors (especially post-traumatic stress disorder) or other comorbid conditions such as depression, anxiety or addictions (Moore & Penk, 2011), and their prevalence in the first year is 7% for active military and 11% for retired military (Thomas *et al.*, 2010). For example, in the British military the prevalence is between 4-6%, with insignificant differences between men and women (Hunt *el al.*, 2014). The Israeli armed force records a prevalence of these disorders of approximately 11% of all forces engaged in the conflict (Levi *et al.*, 2018). The research coordinated by Doron (2005) demonstrated that soldiers who have been injured are at high risk of developing severe forms of trauma-related and comorbid disorders, require a longer recovery time and a more difficult reintegration into society, and a cost high, associated with different specific treatment schemes (Amos, 2014).

Relating the 55,000 veterans from 1993-2020 to the minimum 5% threshold results in a minimum of 2,750 of them potentially meeting diagnostic criteria

for PTSDS and comorbid conditions. Given that in Romania, self-initiated access to mental health services is one of the lowest in Europe, and the assistance given to veterans is currently symbolic, it can be assumed that the real number of veterans diagnosed with mental disorders is closer to the maximum threshold of 18%, i.e. 9,900 people) than the minimum.

In 2018, the first information concerning the soldiers in Romania diagnosed with PTSD - 19 people was published (Sasu, 2018) and subsequently, no more relevant information was published in this regard. This severe underdiagnosis had as its main cause the lack of a specific regulatory framework for the protection of veterans, which was created with the enactment of Law 168/2020 (which was enforced by the Ministry of Defense starting with February 2021 and by the Ministry of Internal Affairs starting with March 2021) and which opens the way to the actual diagnosis of PTSD cases and the protection of veterans' rights, subject to the enforcement of appropriate intervention methodologies. Next, the main categories of interventions practiced in other NATO states are presented (call-center type services, self help groups, computerized platforms for evaluation and psychological intervention by means of virtual reality equipment).

2. CALL-CENTER SERVICE FOR DISABLED VETERANS

In 2015, there was published the first conceptual framework for the implementation of telemedicine in the Romanian military context, through the use of technology, including telephone means (Marineanu, 2015), which was later updated, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This framework is currently being implemented through a volunteer program (https://www.militarypsycho logy.ro/sustinem-veteranii/) to improve the efficiency/responsiveness of the national public health system.

Although most psychologists prefer face-to-face contact with clients or patients who require long-term support, the telephone psychological service provides a viable alternative in the delivery of psychological assistance. Several researches indicate that psychological services delivered remotely, by telephone or online, in most cases, have been able to lead to similar results to conventional psychological interventions (Hilty *et al.*, 2013; Nelson & Sharp, 2016).

The telephone psychological support service for veterans is mainly aimed at promoting healthy behaviors and managing stress. It operates by applying standard procedures, which include various protocols useful for reducing the negative effects of emotional reactions and maladaptive behaviors, developing the ability to manage stress by veterans from theaters of operations, as well as strict intervention protocols, applicable in situations of psychological crisis, (applicable when high-risk behaviors are identified, such as suicide attempts or acts of violence).

Telephone psychological assistance for veterans is carried out by volunteer psychologists, who provide free services to those experiencing intense psycho-behavioral reactions, including manifestations of clinical intensity and requiring focused intervention. This remote psychological support service for veterans follows the principles of best practice guidelines, based on scientific evidence, specific to crisis intervention and psychological first aid.

3. SERVICES FOR SELF HELP GROUPS

Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of having social support for people who belong to vulnerable groups, including veterans with disabilities or who have mental or behavioral health problems (Richard *et al.*, 2017). By social support we mean the support provided by family members, comrades and people with whom they interact systematically in different normal life situations (for example, doctors, commanders, staff of public institutions), called *support groups or networks*. Functional interaction with these groups is one of the strongest protective factors against PTSD symptoms, supports and optimizes the progress made following the provision of specialized psychological assistance, respectively facilitates socio-professional and family integration (Daniel & Owen, 2017; Campos *et al.* , 2016).

Also, the existence of support groups that offer veterans the opportunity to share personal experiences and feelings, adaptive coping strategies, or other information that may contribute to their mental and behavioral health has been shown to be an important predictor of rapid remission of PTSD symptoms or comorbid ones (anxiety, depression, addictions, etc.), respectively of socio-professional reintegration (Schweitzer *et al.*, 2006). Proescher et al. (2020) conducted a research that demonstrated that there are no differences related to gender, age, professional training or the intensity of the traumatic event in

terms of the positive impact that group support has on the person in need. Another study showed that veterans who had a stable support network over time had fewer relapses, no comorbidities, and fewer medical problems (Gros et al., 2020).

Members of these support groups go through training programs (National Health Services, 2001; Sirati-Nir *et al.*; Sunderland & Mishkin, 2013) where they are taught and assimilate information about the problems faced by veterans with disabilities, they learn how to approach them, they learn about crisis intervention and psychological first aid, communication methods and techniques aimed at facilitating a good socio-professional integration. In essence, this approach is oriented towards the recovery of the person, the development of his or her potential, the improvement and maintenance of the quality of life. The key elements are focusing on the person, capitalizing on their potential, respectively the relationship based on empathy and respect, having as benefits the feeling of social belonging, the reduction of stigma and social and professional reintegration (Sunderland, 2013).

Many countries, such as Great Britain, Germany, Canada, the United States of America or Australia have coherent government programs and policies that support the creation of support groups and networks for military veterans with disabilities or who have mental health problems. These programs aim at encouraging active social involvement, facilitating professional retraining, completing studies, obtaining a job, as well as accessing medical services, which in the long term lead to a substantial reduction in the costs borne by health budgets. Findings from several studies suggest that social support received from family members and members of local communities may play a greater protective role than social support received from military sources in regard of long-term PTSD symptoms severity (Adams, 2017; Blais, 2021). For example, good dyadic relationship dynamics within marriage significantly contribute to PTSD recovery (Ein-Dor, 2010, Kimhi, S., & Doron, H. (2013).

4. COMPUTERIZED PLATFORM FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND INTERVENTION

Recent studies have highlighted the undeniable effectiveness of computerized and online solutions used to provide psychological support services at a high quality standard (Varker *et al.*, 2019). Although there are some voices that challenge the effectiveness of this type of mental and behavioral health services, Mohr *et al.* (2014) showed that there is no qualitative or quantitative difference between solutions offered on computerized platforms and *face to face* ones. Moreover, the former have been shown to be highly effective in diagnosing and calibrating intervention in certain categories of patients (e.g., people with disabilities) and in psychiatric disorders (depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder) (Turgoose *et al.*, 2018). Computerized platforms can be used both in actual psychological assessment and in the process of psychological intervention. They offer a number of advantages: easy access, extremely low costs, increased psychological comfort, online and offline use, increased confidentiality, reduction of stigmatization of the person, flexibility, useful databases in the therapeutic approach and observation over time of the state of mental and behavioral health.

This type of platform offers a complete package of solutions that can be used for psychological evaluation in different contexts (psychodiagnosis, psychological intervention, psychological evaluation to determine work capacity, etc.).

The instruments used assess different categories of psychological factors with relevance to health and illness that are grouped into four domains (David, 2016): (1) The domain of life events, which aims at potentially traumatic life events; (2) The domain of mental health components, aimed at dysfunctional psycho-behavioral manifestations or symptoms of mental disorders (Emotional Distress Profile, EDP); (3) The domain of etiopathogenetic mechanisms, targeting general vulnerability factors, such as central and intermediate functional descriptive and inferential cognitions, general irrational evaluative cognitions and *local vulnerability* factors (*DAS Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale*); (4) The domain of sanogenesis mechanisms, which aims at the coping capacity of each person, their own ways to control and reduce emotional distress, the ways of acquiring other meanings in life and connecting to a social support (CERQ - Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, SACS - Strategic Approach to Coping Scale).

5. INTERVENTIONS USING VIRTUAL REALITY (VR) EQUIPMENT

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a common and disabling disorder that often involves avoidance

behavior of traumatic stimuli, behavior that blocks patients' healing and recovery. Among the many approaches that have been used for the treatment of PTSD, exposure procedures in combination with cognitive-behavioral therapy have the best therapeutic results and the best scientific documentation. Prolonged exposure in this case involves confronting the person with the stimuli associated with the trauma, with the aim of reactivating the traumatic memory and integrating corrective information at the level of the traumatic memory. Thus, the pathological elements of the traumatic memory are modified, reducing anxiety and helping the subject to understand the trauma as a specific event and not a representation of a dangerous world and reduced personal competence. In this context, virtual reality exposure therapy, through its multiple functionalities, makes possible multisensory exposure (visual, auditory, kinesthetic and olfactory) to environments that feel "as if they were real" and that increase adherence and patients' tolerability to therapy, without having the financial and time constraints compared to the real world. Thus, this intervention represents a more advantageous alternative to traditional exposure-based therapies, which minimizes avoidance and facilitates emotional processing by helping the patient access the trauma and heal it in a much shorter time frame (Rothbaum *et al.*, 2008).

In addition, virtual reality allows the therapist to expose the patient to conditions that might be unsafe or accessible at very high cost in the outside world. Numerous clinical studies attest to the usefulness and effectiveness of using virtual reality in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, demonstrating that it improves exposure and allows treatment to be applied to a wider segment of the population, such as patients who cannot imagine the stressful environment, or for those which cannot be directly confronted with it, as happens in the case of post-traumatic stress generated by exposure to traumatic events in military theaters of operations (Difede, 2007; Rizzo, 2009; Rothbaum, 2001).

Military actions are probably some of the most challenging situations a human being can experience. The physical, emotional, cognitive, and psychological demands of a combat environment place enormous stress on even the best-trained military personnel. Virtual reality applications are being developed, implemented, and successfully used to identify and treat operational stress disorders in veterans. The ability of virtual technology to create controlled, multi-sensory and interactive environments in which human behavior can be stimulated and measured offers possibilities for clinical assessment and treatment that are not possible using traditional methods.

Virtual reality offers relevant treatment scenarios for soldiers who develop stress symptoms as a result of exposure to combat theaters, as well as comorbid conditions (anxiety, depression, different types of addictions). In this context, the researcher has the opportunity to adapt each visual, auditory, olfactory, and kinesthetic exposure scenario to the traumatic experience of the person undergoing treatment and to control what is presented to the subject. In addition, the virtual reality system offers the possibility of physiological pulse measurement, skin electrical conductivity and breathing monitoring, generating additional information on the patient's working parameters.

Numerous studies in the specialized literature confirm the effectiveness of this technology in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in the military population, proving to be more effective than traditional therapy in terms of acceptance, benefit in terms of treatment and clinical success. Through its attractive and non-traditional aspect, this treatment approach also addresses the issue of stigma, proving to be more attractive to veterans who are reluctant to seek help through what they perceive as traditional dialogue therapies (Rizzo *et al.*, 2011).

The positive results obtained in this area encourage researchers to further gather feedback from the military and develop improved applications for using virtual simulation for other purposes such as: neurocognitive assessment and rehabilitation, creating experiential contexts in which individuals can learn emotional, cognitive coping strategies and behavioral, determining patterns of behavior and physiological responses that may predict risk for developing a disorder. Thus, virtual reality enhances the mechanisms and procedures of classical psychotherapy by creating fictitious, safe and controllable environments that can increase the emotional commitment and acceptance of patients, thus reducing the risk of negative feelings (e.g. shame, emotional pain, embarrassment) and the damage caused by them.

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Cognitive Warfare

NOBODY: THE NAME BEHIND INFORMATIONAL BLINDNESS. THE RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE IN UKRAINE

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Abstract: *Under the guise of the name of Nobody that the cunning Odysseus chooses in his confrontation with the Cyclops Polyphemus, the current Russian information war in Ukraine has all the characteristics of disinformation by doctrinal dissimulation. The very concept of information warfare, borrowed from Western doctrines, covers a wider field of action, being operationally in line with the reflexive control theory inherited from the Soviet period. The tools, techniques and methods of Western information operations are no match for those engaged in Russian information warfare, because the Russian Federation is raising the stakes of this conflict from the hard power level to the springs of all forms of power, soft and hard: political, economic, symbolic and military, under a misleading name. This article aims to further investigate the forms of Russian doctrinal dissimulation by using concepts such as hybrid warfare (Lesenciuc, 2023) and to analyze the objectives, activities, targets and effects of Russian information warfare in the invasion of Ukraine.*

Keywords*: information operations; information confrontation; reflexive control; Russian invasion in Ukraine; doctrinal dissimulation*

1. INTRODUCTION. THE SEARCH FOR *NOBODY*

Ulysses, the king of the small island of Ithaca in the Ionian Sea, was called "Odysseus" by the Greeks – a name that can be translated as "the ugly one." He took part in the Trojan War as one of Helen's suitors and played a significant role in the conflict: acting, on one hand, as a mediator between Agamemnon and Achilles; on the other hand, bringing Iphigenia to Aulis to be sacrificed; infiltrating the city as a spy and negotiating Helen's betrayal of the Trojans; and, most famously, devising the wooden horse – the poisoned gift that would alter the course of the war. We shall not focus on these feats of war, most of which would now be classified as soft power actions in contemporary terminology, but rather on the moment, after his wanderings at sea, when – upon reaching the land of the Cyclopes – he managed to deceive Polyphemus, blinded his single eye, and left him lost in the fog, searching for a culprit who had given his name as *Nobody*. (Οὖτις, in old Greek)

The search for *Nobody* has become symptomatic of confrontations in which the soft dimension – particularly the symbolic dimension of power – prevails, and in which deception, psychological operations aimed at influencing the adversary's will, and the informational exploitation of other domains – such as the cyber domain, for instance – are typical courses of action. The Machiavellian pattern of action, blending cynical practices of political influence (ugly practices, possible to associate them with pre-Machiavellian, Odyssean political cunning – implying trickery, deceit, lack of scruples, corruption, betrayal, etc.) with symbolic, economic, and above all military actions, necessarily involves dissimulation, starting with the simple act of naming. On the topic of doctrinal dissimulation in the use of the concept *gibridnaya voina*, seemingly similar to *hybrid warfare,* we elaborated in the study *Hybrid War or the Return to Absolute War through Doctrinal Dissimulation* (Lesenciuc, 2023). However, the distinction between the two terms became evident not long after the publication of the Gerasimov Doctrine (Gerasimov, 2013), through the works of Andrew Monaghan (2015), Mark Galeotti (2016; 2018; 2019), Ofer Fridman (2018), among others. Even though the concept of "doctrinal dissimulation" – which involves disinformation through the use of identical military terminology in differing doctrines, concealing divergent actions under the same label in order to achieve surprise – has not yet opened a distinct line of academic inquiry, numerous subsequent studies have noted the operational divergence projected within a

seemingly unified semantic field, including those of Anastasiya Filina (2023) and Lance Bokinskie (2024).

In *Hybrid War...* (Lesenciuc, 2019), we attempted to highlight what may lie hidden within a name – more precisely, the strategic potential embedded in the act of naming within doctrinal frameworks:

> As long as the symbolic forms through which disinformation-altered messages can be packaged require constant diversification – and such diversification is usually met with appropriate countermeasures on the battlefield, ultimately shaping a certain horizon of expectations – the Russian school of military thought has devised a solution aligned with the need expressed in the Gerasimov Doctrine: to maintain initiative in the confrontation with the American doctrine.
>
> However, this position at the forefront of global military thinking was not achieved through the concepts of information warfare, network-centric warfare, or even hybrid warfare.
>
> Its strategic priority lies in the appropriation and operational use of the doctrines of adversaries or potential adversaries (in any case, competitors in the field of *soft power*), with the aim of deception and disinformation (Lesenciuc, 2023:32).

Yet, although the effects of disinformation through doctrinal dissimulation are more pronounced in the case of the hybrid warfare concept than in that of information warfare, such an analysis of the information operations design remains worth considering.

Evidently, behind these acts of "informational blindness" stands *Nobody* – an entity without identity and, more importantly, without a name – who can thus appear under its true name on the stage of international relations without facing any consequences.

2. RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE

2.1 Information warfare. The major transformations of recent years in the information environment, combined with battlefield experience and the lessons learned from recent conflicts, have elevated the concept of information operations to increasing importance within most doctrinal frameworks, particularly in NATO member states.

Throughout history, information has been a crucial and decisive pillar in the conduct of conflicts, representing a fundamental requirement in shaping the conditions for victory. As conflicts have evolved – driven by advances in military capabilities, technologies, procedures, and combat tactics – the communicational/ informational architecture of the battlefield has gained prominence, eventually becoming central.

Beginning with Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003), when "air supremacy became a means to achieve and maintain information supremacy" (Lesenciuc, 2014:135), the informational architecture of the battlefield could no longer be overlooked. This led, on the one hand, to the transformation of the battlefield into a networked environment and, on the other, to the increasing hybridization of military actions. In the context of contemporary warfare, many military actions have shifted focus from destruction to information and influence. Taking into account the diversification of conflict participants, the hybrid nature of military actions has become increasingly evident, reflected in the growing role of "soft," non-lethal, or non-kinetic military actions—among which information operations stand out as the most significant. Today, information operations are recognized as a force multiplier across all dimensions of military engagement. Enabled by technology, they can initiate strategic actions aimed at influencing political decision-making, public opinion, and the course of events at the strategic level.

In an era marked by the hybridization of power forms, increasingly blurred boundaries between soft and hard power, rapid technological innovation, and significant socio-political transformations, contemporary conflict is no longer defined solely by conventional military actions but also by an intensified struggle within the informational sphere. Within this context, information operations have become fundamental to strategic planning. These operations go beyond merely acquiring and transmitting information; they also involve manipulating and shaping perceptions in order to influence public opinion, political decisions, and even the course of conflicts (Jagiełło-Tondera, 2019).

Nowadays, the evolution of conflicts has undergone significant transformations, requiring not only military force, but also informational manipulation and influence over public opinion. The new paradigm of conflict is marked by contradictory trends, involving both the alternation and overlap between heightened interest in battlefield architecture and the mass deployment of troops, as well as between the effects of constructivist thinking in international relations and the resurgence of political realism, re-branded through illiberal regimes.

The very use of the term "information war" represents a victory in the imposition of Russian terminology, as the reference term in Western doctrines – including those of NATO – is "information operations."

In the Russian context, however, the use of the term "information war" naturally reflects an extension beyond the scope defined in Western doctrines – namely, beyond the boundaries of military power, where such concepts would traditionally be expected to apply.

In the Western sense, Information Operations are, according to NATO specific Doctrine,

> A staff function to analyze, plan, assess and integrate information activities to create desired effects on the will, understanding. and capability of adversaries, potential adversaries and audiences in support of mission objectives. (AJP 10.1, 2023:14-15)

The information environment,

> the principal environment of decision-making; where humans and automated systems observe, conceive, process, process, orient, decide and act on data, information and knowledge. (AJP 10.1, 2023:10),

has become the true confrontational space in contemporary conflict, characterized by the hybrid pattern of associated actions, from physical destruction per se to psychological operations or presence, profile and posture (see the full spectrum of key coordinated domains in the information operations chariot in relation to the predominant types of information activities, Lesenciuc, 2016:70). In spite of these transformations, rigorous military planning characterizes information operations, and this planning cannot neglect the consideration of objectives, activities, targets and effects, an analytical scheme that we will apply in the following to highlight the implementation of the Russian information warfare concept.

2.2 Theoretical and doctrinal foundations of Russian information warfare. The use of information for manipulation is a fact of warfare everywhere and at all times. Therefore, the component elements of information operations: psychological operations, misleading, cyber operations, electronic warfare and others are of considerable antiquity and have been used in various forms in different conflicts. In the case of the Russian Federation, however, there is a strong

Soviet tradition - a radiography of this period of the field's development was made by Allen & Moore (2018:61-62), later materialized by a significant post-Soviet academic interest, starting from the concept of "reflexive control" (*reflexivnoe upravlenie*), atypical of Western military thinking, whose roots can be traced back to the 1960s and which was later tested at the tactical and operational level along with *maskirovka* (deception) and disinformation (Thomas, 2004:239). From the perspective of this theory which is still producing effects today and which is focused on the moral and psychological exploitation of the adversary, starting with the commanders of enemy structures, imitating the behavior of the adversary is a useful strategy:

> In a war in which reflexive control is being employed, the side with the highest degree of reflex (the side best able to imitate the other side's thoughts or predict its behavior) will have the best chances of winning. The degree of reflex depends on many factors, the most important of which are analytical capability, general erudition and experience, and the scope of knowledge about the enemy. (Thomas, 2004: 242)

The theory of reflexive control involves actions that fit into what is the Western concept of information operations, such as influencing the enemy's decision-making algorithm or altering the decision-making time, to which are added actions on the soft, political and symbolic power levels, such as measures to present false information about the situation and, above all, power pressure, including effects on both soft and hard levels, in the perspective of :

> the use of superior force, force demonstrations, psychological attacks, ultimatums, threats of sanctions, threats of risk (developed by focusing attention on irrational behavior or conduct, or delegating powers to an irresponsible person), combat reconnaissance, provocative maneuvers, weapons tests, denying enemy access to or isolating certain areas, increasing the alert status of forces, forming coalitions, officially declaring war, support for internal forces destabilizing the situation in the enemy rear, limited strikes to put some forces out of action, exploiting and playing up victory, demonstrating ruthless actions, and showing mercy toward an enemy ally that has stopped fighting. (Ionov, 1994:47, *apud* Thomas, 2004:244-245)

From the perspective of Russian military theorist S.A. Komov (1997:18-22, *apud* Thomas, 2004:248-249), in the meantime "refexive control"

was called "intellectual control", it was assimilated to information warfare and involves the following actions: distraction, overload, paralysis, exhaustion, deception, division, pacification, deterrence, provocation, overload, suggestion and pressure. The concept is very important to the Russian Federation and is now widely used, based on the belief that the United States and the European West won the Cold War thanks to reflexive control initiatives.

As in the case of hybrid warfare, for using the concept of information warfare – although a similar term pre-exists in Russian scholarship, proposed in 2006 by Russian professor and political scientist Igor Panarin - General Valery Gerasimov, Russian Armed Forces Chief of Staff blamed Western states, involved in hybrid actions in the colored revolutions in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and in the Arab Spring phenomenon, invoking the need for defense, and the response to the hybrid threat carried out on the soft and hard power levels could only come through an action tool that would involve both simultaneously. In this sense, two years before the Gerasimov Doctrine, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation had already defined information warfare on the skeleton of the "reflexive control" theory, as follows:

> as the ability to . . . undermine political, economic, and social systems; carry out mass psychological campaigns against the population of a state in order to destabilize society and the government; and force a state to make decisions in the interest of their opponents. (*Conceptual Views regarding the Activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in Information Space*, 2011, *apud* Thomas, 2015:12, *apud* Allen & Moore, 2018:60))

at a time when a more westernized concept of information operations, *information confrontation*, was operational in the Moscow scientific environment:

> Russian military doctrine also describes a broader concept of information confrontation (информационное противоборство) that incorporates military/technical battlefield effects and informational/psychosocial effects "designed to shape perceptions and manipulate the behavior of target audiences (Allen & Moor, 2018:60).

The reference element in the operation of the three concepts: reflexive control at the theoretical level, information war at the political, economic, symbolic and military level and information confrontation predominantly at the military level is that they are continuously applicable, before, during and after the actual military actions, under the conditions of the declaration or non-declaration of war. The three levels (theoretical, and applied: strategic and operational) ensure the construction of an altered, convenient reality, in line with the main narratives and carrying content aligned with these narratives, capable of producing distrust, disorder and dissent.

2.3 Russian Information Warfare. The implementation of the concept of information warfare, in its classical sense, has never been confined to the Western projective framework of information operations. Possessing exceptional informational capabilities, the Russian Federation has developed a distinct approach to conducting information activities both on the battlefield and beyond its spatial and temporal boundaries, based on the notion of ensuring individual and societal information security (Thomas, 2007:40). Timothy L. Thomas attributes this difference in approach to the broader context, noting that the Russian Federation has been undergoing a process of transition marked by institutional and philosophical instability, as well as vulnerabilities generated by various internal factors, in contrast to the United States.

The concept of information warfare, in this terminological formulation, is attributed to Igor Panarin (2006:146) and constitutes one of the pillars of hybrid warfare, alongside Evgheni Messner's insurgency warfare and Aleksandr Dugin's network-centric warfare, as we highlighted in my analysis of this concept (Leenciuc, 2023:31-32), exceeding the purely military scope and engaging in disinformation through doctrinal dissimulation.

> From a content perspective, the differences are significant. Each of the concepts analyzed, starting with that of hybrid warfare, exceeds the boundaries of the theater of operations. For instance, the "network" in Dugin's concept of net-centric war represents a "flexible weapon" that requires engagement at the political, social, economic, and cultural levels. The information in Panarin's *information warfare*, in turn, constitutes a flexible weapon and exceeds the American military concept, targeting informational confrontation in the political, diplomatic, economic, and military arenas. Dugin's and Panarin's concepts are ideologically fueled in a similar way and define, at different levels, similar phenomena. In short, the Russian theory of *hybrid warfare* is based on American concepts used within the scope of military

operations, extending them – under the guise of American nonlinear actions condemned by Gerasimov – into a broader confrontation, across all levels: *soft* (political, economic, cultural) and *hard* (military). In fact, Russian policy relies on this misdirection through terminological confusion and the use of propaganda at various levels, exceeding military boundaries.

Panarin's information warfare concept involves informational confrontation on issues that include, among other things, propaganda (at all levels) and intelligence activities – exceeding the American doctrinal framework that includes this component, military intelligence on the battlefield: information operations intelligence integration (IOII) (Lesenciuc, 2016:54) – and assumes, based on a thought process rooted in the realist paradigm, the continuous and constant informational confrontation between state actors. After being grounded in the theoretical foundations of "reflexive control" and the doctrinal principles of information warfare, the concept was first applied during the 2008 conflict in Georgia, where the informational confrontation during peacetime was initially won by the Georgians, then by the Russians. This led to a series of post-conflict reforms within the military. The informational confrontation occurred on two levels: information-technical (focused on cyber confrontation, or cybernetic operations, see Vevera & Ciupercă, 2019:33-34) and information-psychological (focused on psychological confrontation in the Western sense, supplemented by extensive propaganda actions), with effects on international relations (Iasiello, 52-53). The effects of this propaganda included the imposition of a standardized image in international political relations.

The same did not occur during the Crimean conflict. Although there were a number of similar premises, such as the fact that in both annexed regions, South Ossetia and Crimea, a high percentage of the population was of Russian origin or pro-Russian orientation, the lessons of the Georgian war did not serve to impose an image that would lead, at the political level (since Russian information warfare also covers this layer), to the international recognition of the peninsula's annexation. On the information-technical level, the Russian Federation extended attacks not only on the Ukrainian state but also on officials and institutions in NATO and EU member states. On the information-psychological level, the Russians could not justify a direct threat, which is why propaganda, disinformation, and deception were extended especially in new media and produced effects mainly at the political and social levels, with only subsidiary military arguments. The Russian information warfare during the Crimea annexation period involved dissimulation on multiple layers, including the application of democratic exercises in the peninsula.

> Perhaps the most telling aspect of success, Russia kept its biggest adversaries—the United States and NATO—from intervening thereby enabling a referendum in which the Crimean parliament voted to join Russia. While the West refuses to acknowledge Crimea's secession, Russia attests full compliance with democratic procedures, a fact difficult to argue against on an international stage (Iasiello, 2017:58)

The Russian information warfare is an asymmetric weapon in the confrontation with the states against which it was applied, Georgia and Ukraine, reinforcing the idea that this concept, as generally understood by Western states within the framework of information operations, can produce major geopolitical effects with limited resources and minimal military involvement. However, all of this unfolded under the imprint of disinformation through doctrinal dissimulation, meaning deceiving important adversaries regarding the content of a term extended in its application at the level of soft powers: information warfare. The concept was later included in what is technically referred to as the "new generation war," as emphasized by Emilio J. Iasiello (2017:60), or, keeping the projective framework from which we started, as an independent dimension of *gibridnaya voina*.

3. THE INFORMATION WAR IN UKRAINE STARTING FROM 2022

In the period leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and throughout the ongoing conflict, social media served as a battleground for both state and non-state actors, as well as individual or corporate entities that spread various war scenarios influenced by dominant narratives or counter-narratives. As the war prolonged, digital platforms were flooded with disinformation produced as part of the Russian information war strategy. Analyzing these operations from the perspective of objectives, activities carried out, targets, and intended/achieved effects, the conflict in Ukraine constitutes a comprehensive framework for examining Russian information warfare.

The objectives of Russian information warfare derive directly from the goals of the invasion and are primarily focused on the political dimension, which exceeds the classical understanding of information operations. As early as 2014, Jolanta Darczewska (2014:3) highlighted this aspect:

> Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea, its aggressive behaviour against eastern Ukraine (the conflict over "Novorossiya") and its destabilisation of the Ukrainian state have become yet another field of Russia's experimentation with information operations.

She also noted that these strategic objectives have remained unchanged for many years. The difference between 2014 – the year of Crimea's annexation and the opening of the conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk – and the beginning of the conflict in 2022 lies in the fact that the initially concealed military commitment is now covered by the phrase "special military operation," with the observation that two of the identified features have remained the same: "the information space is the main battlefield" and "large groups of the public are being involved in the fight" (Darczewska, 2014:8).

In the context in which both state actors involved in the conflict – the Russian Federation and Ukraine – widely use social media to promote their own versions of unfolding events and to amplify contrasting narratives about the war, including its causes, consequences, and progression, the information operations conducted by the Russian Federation, unlike previous actions, have involved, in the case of the war in Ukraine, both a focus on new mass communication tools and the achievement of a third level of action – the formation of the so-called information system. This involves collecting, analyzing, and complementing digital data, as well as discrediting media outlets and other sources of information, according to the analysis by Cherniavska *et al.* (2023:920). Moreover, this level surpasses the earlier stages: information campaign (which entails the formation of social and political thought and the influence on social, economic, and political sentiment) and information attack (carried out through the discrediting of national attributes and the use of propaganda rhetoric).

The response of the Ukrainian administration was at the same level. Government officials, citizens, and state agencies turned to a variety of platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram, to disseminate information. For example, in the early days of the war, Kyiv issued appeals on Facebook for donations to purchase UAVs or even campaigns to join associations of personnel who own or operate drones. Informal donation pages were created to support online efforts aimed at acquiring civilian drones. The Russian administration made similar attempts, but their efforts were not as successful as those of the Ukrainians. Nevertheless, drone donations supported both actors in generating and sustaining concentrated military power. The objectives achieved with the help of this technology included conducting reconnaissance and aerial surveillance missions, as well as assessing target effects and optimizing the use of ground-based assets.

The activities associated with the creation of the information system as a result of the information war triggered reactions from the international community. Due to the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation, states that had previously maintained strategic partnerships with the aggressor state chose not to intervene or express any reaction regarding the conflict. The effects of the information war initially turned into a significant victory for Ukraine, which succeeded in gaining international support through political instruments, complementing these actions with efforts on the informational front.

Ukraine's success in gaining international sympathy was reinforced by results on the battlefield, while psychological actions to boost confidence in its own troops were carried out through targeted *new media* messaging, including memes featuring the "Saint Javelin" and farmers towing Russian tanks. The outcome, alongside political efforts to mobilize military and humanitarian donations, led to significant fundraising for the war, with substantial donations primarily from NATO member states. The Russian Federation responded to this unexpected support by trying to maintain the functionality of what is referred to as the "information system" (Cherniavska *et al.*, 2023) at a level of informational aggression that Iryna Vekhovtseva (2023:27) called "information violence" — a form of non-kinetic, aggressive influence that contradicts the natural course of events, manifests imperceptibly and over time, and involves imposing the beliefs of the Russian Federation or distorted information about Ukraine while establishing asymmetric relations.

Indeed, since the beginning of 2014, Russia has launched informational operations, promoting disinformation regarding a false Ukrainian

chemical and biological weapons program in order to justify the invasion and discourage sympathy and support for Ukraine. Among the false claims circulated by the Russian Ministry of Defense are accusations that Ukraine carried out a "chemical drone attack" against Russian forces, and that it launched a new anti-drone laser – all promoted with the aim of deterring Western support.

The activities associated with Russian information warfare go far beyond the conceptual framework of information operations as understood by Western NATO and EU member states. In its operations, the Russian Federation has included actions within the social media sector – where they attempted bombardment with stimuli in a deployment aligned with the principles of network warfare developed by ideologue Aleksandr Dugin (2009), through non-state entities associated with the Eurasian movement: "These agitation-propaganda and intelligence-organisation activities are carried out by non-state actors" (Krawczyk & Wiśnicki, 2022:279). They also used deepfake elements powered by AI to reinforce ideologically altered information and fake news, mainly through Telegram, the most important social media platform in both Russia and Ukraine. Grouping these actions under the umbrella of information war, projected at the level of soft power, was done in accordance with the principles of reflexive control:

> "Thanks to numerous network connections, it intoxicates the information environment by reinforcing Russian narrative lines according to the principles of Russian reflexive management theory." (Krawczyk & Wiśnicki, 2022:284)

The targets of Russian information warfare have become increasingly diverse, both in terms of the wide range of operations it encompasses – from psychological to cyber operations – and especially due to the testing and adaptation of new technologies to the realities of the battlefield. As a result, the targets are primarily concentrated outside military structures: administrative institutions, critical infrastructures, websites, networks, and individuals. The tools through which these targets are reached in information warfare include, primarily, propaganda, dis- and misinformation, Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS), website defacement, malware etc.

The effects of the informational operations intentionally carried out by the Russians can be grouped into a series of action themes that, as can be observed, target not only the Ukrainian army,

but the entire population of the country, as well as targets outside it:

a) Demoralization of Ukrainians through disinformation actions aimed at undermining the morale of the population and institutions in Ukraine; creating and spreading internal unrest in Ukraine, starting from the dissemination of fake news, such as those about the surrender of the government or the Ukrainian army; lowering the morale of the troops and the trust of the Ukrainian population in their own army by launching accusations of corruption and incompetence against the country's leadership;

b) Creating a rift between Ukraine and its allies through disinformation campaigns that include false narratives about relations with neighbors, particularly with Poland, regarding intentions to annex territories; amplifying such information through networks and spreading false informational materials, including maps and documents with an impact on an unprepared public; disinformation about the erosion of Ukraine's relations with Western Europe due to internal issues and the high costs associated with the war; spreading false information about the involvement of Ukrainian refugees in criminal activities outside the country's borders; spreading materials about the disproportionate social benefits that Ukrainian refugees receive in host countries, which can provoke social and political tensions within these countries;

c) Strengthening the positive public perception of the Russian Federation (Most of these targeted at the Russian domestic audience, emphasizing the need for Russia to "sell" a certain image of the war to its own population), based on scenarios aimed at reinforcing the perception of the Russian state's reasons for launching military operations, relying on the denial and distortion of information, including dismissing as false information regarding war crimes; creating false news spread across networks about the inhumane and unjust actions of the Ukrainian army; creating fake social media accounts promoting Russian narratives; denying the effects of sanctions against Russia and supporting the claim that these measures have harmed the West far more than the sanctioned state.

Essentially, the narratives presented by Russia and Ukraine are diametrically opposed. Russia frames the war in Ukraine, which President Vladimir Putin insists is a "special military operation," as a necessary defensive measure in response to NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe. Additionally, the Russian president frames

the military campaign as essential for "denazifying" Ukraine and ending an alleged genocide being carried out by the Ukrainian government against Russian-speaking citizens.

The scale of information uploaded on social media and the speed at which it proliferates create new and complex challenges in combating disinformation campaigns, complemented by other tools involved in informational warfare. The aim of Russian informational actions is not to make Ukrainians or allies believe something, but to spread distrust, confusion, and disinterest in the actual situation on the battlefield. The most widespread narrative of the Russian Federation, which portrays Ukraine as a "failed state," is disseminated through a series of messages, which Dzhus (2023:85) summarizes as follows: "The messages that fill this narrative are about history, corruption, culture, economics, and more. That is anything that can be used to support the narrative." The narratives and informational actions aimed at influencing the will to fight and the trust in one's own forces are contradictory and easy to counter with rational arguments, but the creation of a climate of distrust in information sources is, in fact, the most acute problem in this context.

4. CONCLUSIONS. IDENTITY OF *NOBODY*

A few days before the beginning of the war in Ukraine, US President Joe Biden, visibly tired but firm in his statements, spoke about the identity of *Nobody*, the one willing to produce information blindness through information war. From President Biden's speech, various analysts have drawn attention to various aspects of the speech, insisting on the firmness of the statements, the readiness for diplomatic dialogue, the unity of the West, the distrust of the Russian side in the absence of any written understandings. I would like to emphasize the last firm response by the American President on Russia's possible courses of action, when the diplomatic option was still open:

> And if Russia attacks the United States or our Allies through asymmetric means, like disruptive cyberattacks against our companies or critical infrastructure, we are prepared to respond. (Biden, 2022, *apud* Meyer & Johnson, 2022).

Therefore, Joe Biden, in a speech of an overtly informative character, addressing first American citizens, then Russian citizens and then citizens of NATO member countries, considered the possibility of Russian military attack on Ukraine,

i.e. invasion of Ukrainian territory, but concluded by emphasizing the likelihood of asymmetric attacks. During the Cold War, neither Stalin, Khrushchev nor any of the other Soviet presidents committed the folly of direct confrontation. Wars were fought through third parties (proxy wars) in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East. The entry of one of the two superpowers into the war: the US in Korea and Vietnam, the USSR in Afghanistan, has entailed a direct non-involvement of the other side. The war in Ukraine is perhaps the biggest challenge since the Cuban Missile Crisis, which is why the American president has cautiously considered all possibilities.

Probably the most important statement is the one about Russia's asymmetric attacks, especially cyber attacks. It could be inferred from the discursive organization that the US is preparing for a false de-escalation of the military situation on the border with Ukraine, coupled with massive cyber-attacks and various other forms of asymmetric informational manifestations, not to be claimed at the state level, but to be blamed on *Nobody.*

In fact, Putin's policy has been to build asymmetric instruments with which to counter the action capabilities of his adversaries. For example, in the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, Russia, which in 2008 was led by Medvedev but had Putin as prime minister (we are not debating the Kremlin leader's thirst for power here), did not impose its will solely through the 200 000 troops deployed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The military confrontation was coupled with cyber-attacks, which involved taking control of the Georgian presidential website as well as important institutions, including the Parliament, the National Bank, the Foreign Ministry. The result of the war was the imposition of the Kremlin's own will, forcing the Georgians to accept Russia's conditions. President Bush's lack of reaction and the appointment of Sarkozy as EU mediator reinforced Putin's conviction that he can do anything. The annexation of Crimea happened under similar conditions. Russia, concerned about the fate of Russians in Crimea, has begun a series of military intimidation operations in the area. Propaganda has been used to fuel the secessionist current within the population of the region. The clashes between the pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainians and Tatars who demanded that the *status quo* be maintained were arbitrated, this time too, by Russian military, at the very time of the referendum. The Russian military seized control of local government bodies, blocked airports, acted on local critical infrastructure, and through their

intimidation and propaganda imposed a result reminiscent of the Soviet period: more than 95% of the population of Crimea voted for annexation to Russia. Russian military maneuvers on the border with Ukraine and, subsequently, cyber-attacks against Ukraine, against the background of the Gerasimov doctrine, have once again led to the imposition of the will of the Kremlin, and more specifically the will of President Vladimir Putin.

All of this was possible because disinformation through doctrinal dissimulation worked. NATO member states expected information operations as they projected in their own doctrines, while the Russian Federation had built the much larger infrastructure of information warfare that went beyond the military dimension of the conflict. NATO member states expected hybrid actions as their own theorists were trying to define them, while *gibridnaya voina* was already a monster oversized to the scale of Putin's ambitions. Putin's Russia did not refrain from using asymmetric means, including cyber-attacks, against Ukraine and other countries, under the protection of a doctrine fed from the Western doctrinal corpus. The Gerasimov Doctrine had already achieved, through doctrinal dissimulation, the transfer of American concepts from the strictly military application to the societal level (it generalized war, transformed it from a space of eminently military actions into a space of interference of forms of power). Hybrid warfare, based on the concepts of insurgency warfare, information warfare and cyber warfare, has made it possible to use these concepts – which are to be found in NATO and US doctrinal apparatus – but has deliberately mixed up the offensive and defensive dimensions of information operations. While in NATO doctrine, for example, defensive psychological, cyber and electronic actions can be carried out to protect its own information, information systems and troops, offensive actions and the exploitation of an adversary's infrastructure require the approval of targets by the North Atlantic Council, Russia carries out offensive actions against its adversaries or potential adversaries without any moral restrictions. Moral asymmetry primarily characterizes Russia's actions. Long-term, an international agreement regarding the morality of using offensive informational means is needed, while short-term, a response with the same measure from the targeted countries is required. The first measure will reduce the informational fog of the contemporary battlefield and will prohibit hiding behind the name *Nobody*, while the second

will force the clarification of identity and intentions, in a chivalrous spirit.

Note on naming: One of Putin's major territorial targets remains the city of Odessa, built by Empress Catherine II on the ruins of the Turkish fortress Hacıbey after the Russo-Turkish war of 1787-1792. At that time, the empress chose the feminine version of the name Odysseus. The current war, fought under the mask of the name *Nobody*, under which Odysseus hid on the shores of the Cyclops, can only lead to the emergence of a *No Man's Land* of uncertainty.

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MILITARY ETHICS IN THE LIGHT OF COGNITIVE WARFARE

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Abstract: *Hybrid warfare encompasses a broad spectrum of military and non-military tactics employed, in a coordinated manner, in order to destabilize and undermine adversaries. In the context of the Age of Hybridity, in the light of the use of new, unconventional operations, is the use of conventionally trained regular forces still effective? The answer is no. This paper explores part of the premises of the status rerum, along with the implications of the migration of the confrontational COG (Center of Gravity) from the physical and virtual domains, to the cognitive one. Taking into consideration the previously mentioned, the implementation of resilience training becomes increasingly interconnected to the field of military ethics. The goal of the paper is, therefore, to determine the correlation between advances in the field of cognitive research and the effectiveness of military resilience training, both from a doctrinal and an empirical point of view.*

Keywords: *hybrid warfare; ethics; cognitive warfare; resilience training*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the Age of Hybridity, Cognitive Warfare, an important component of Hybrid Warfare, alongside its key components, such as Psychological Operations are difficult to monitor from an ethical point of view. Integrating the new and emerging military phenomena in the context of military ethics demands new ways of training, in order to achieve the desired level of preparedness of the military decision-making personnel. The advances in the field of cognitive research have made this possible. Through military resilience training, both physical and psychological toughness can be acquired

2. HYBRID WARFARE IN THE CONTEXT OF NATO ALLIED DOCTRINES

The Alliance doctrines emphasize the importance of rapid detection, effective deterrence and, if necessary, defense against hybrid attacks to safeguard member nations.

2.1 Key components. Hybrid warfare consists of multiple key components. Having realized the power that human perception holds in the decision-making process, it has been weaponized. As the great military strategist Sun Tzu once stated, "All war is based on deception". Therefore, planting a seed of specifically targeted information in one's mind can later grow to drastically influence the outcome of his process of thought and thus, his behavior. All of these have metamorphosed into disinformation and propaganda. According to (Hoffman, 2014), deliberately disseminating false or misleading information to influence public opinion, sow discord or manipulate perceptions, through media channels, social platforms or other communication means, can successfully serve an actor's strategies and objectives.

Moreover, taking into consideration that in the information age, most databases, military organization and communication systems and civil-military cooperation interfaces have migrated to the virtual domain, these have become critical infrastructure as well. Therefore, Cyber Attacks are an important aspect of hybrid warfare, being manifested through operations that target digital infrastructure in order to disrupt services, steal sensitive information or compromise critical systems.

Hybrid warfare, just like any other kind of warfare encompasses, inevitably, a political side and, can be manifested through political means just as well. Engaging in activities that influence the political processes of a nation, including influencing of the election process, supporting fringe political groups or undermining governmental institutions can create internal discord. There are also, more diplomatic ways of interference, such as economic pressure, using economic tools such as sanctions, trade restrictions or manipulation of

resources to coerce or weaken target nations. Last, but not least, it would be impossible to only focus on the overt side of hybrid warfare, when covert operations are being waged. This is where the ethics of new era military operations come in question. Conducting sabotage to damage or destroy critical infrastructure, such as power grids, communication networks or other societal functions, therefore instilling fear throughout the population, utilizing proxy forces, paramilitaries or insurgents to conduct military operations without direct attribution, can these be called covert operations or unethical demeanor? The line between the former and the latter is, unfortunately, not very clearly drawn.

2.2 Psychological Operations. The general context having been described, the particular one can come in sight. According to the Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations (AJP-3.10.1, 2014), PSYOPS are a key component of hybrid warfare, encompassing specialists and techniques used to manipulate the human perception in support of conventional operations.

The previously mentioned specialists can act in multiple ways: they can spread specifically designed and created narratives that exploit societal divisions, undermine trust in institutions, or create fear and uncertainty, they can use social media, traditional media or covert channels in order to shape the opinions of the target audience into fitting the given objectives, they can weaken the resolve of conventional military forces, government decision-making officials or the civilian population through misinformation, fake news or psychological intimidation or, moreover, they can act through covert means and exploit the cultural and political fault lines by amplifying existing societal conflicts, fueling protests, or creating artificial movement to destabilize a country from within. Trying to integrate all of these new and emerging concepts in the thinking systems of conventionally trained military leaders can prove to be difficult. Given the human nature: a tendency towards inertia and reluctance to change, it is hard to embrace new military phenomena and to develop the ways of proper training for the new era soldiers who need to be ready for these challenges

2.3 Cognitive Warfare. According to the Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations (AJP-10.1, 2023), there are three domains that belong to the information environment and where military operations can be lead. As enumerated on a temporal axis, according to their time of maximal importance, the physical, virtual and cognitive domains. The first two, interconnected as they are, are very well known together with the risks they imply. From the national and also from the military alliance point of view, the great majority of soldiers are trained as to recognize and manage threats that are specific to the physical and virtual domains or to correlations between the two. Thus, in the age of hybridity, threats related to the cognitive domain are more numerous and less easy to identify, so consequently, more dangerous. The training of all categories of military personnel lacks focus for the cognitive warfare aspects.

Hybrid warfare combines conventional and unconventional tactics. According to (Pripoae-Șerbănescu, 2023), if hybrid warfare will become the standard for confrontation in the future and the informational and psychological sides of hybridity will be the at the top of the threat spectrum, then Cognitive Warfare needs to become a must in matters of military studies in order to be able to fullfil the need to understand and respond to future security menaces. Having understood that, in the context of the previously mentioned, psychological influence can be technologically mediated, it is possible to agree on the fact that the Cognitive domain of confrontation is the one that crowns the pyramid of military confrontation domains.

Cognitive Warfare focuses on manipulating perceptions, influencing decision-making and undermining the adversary's psychological and cognitive processes. These effects can be acquired by directing specifically designed narratives of altered or manipulated information to the targets whose perceptions are aimed to be changed. Military decision-making personnel can most surely be integrated in the target audience category and be submitted to multiple attempts of manipulation or persuasion, aiming to influence the outcome of their thinking process. When analyzing the doctrinal perspective of the military alliance and the member states, it is obvious to conclude that most components of Cognitive Warfare and especially, of Psychological Operations are not exclusively directed to adversaries or potential adversaries, but also, to partner states and militaries. In the light of these facts, it is important that the security culture of soldiers encompasses knowledge of Cognitive Warfare, its place in Hybrid Warfare and threats that these new era operations imply.

2.4 Integrating new military phenomena in the context of military ethics. According to (Olsthoorn, 2010), military ethics is a branch of

applied ethics that governs the conduct of armed forces in war and peace. It defines the moral principles, values and standards that guide military personnel in their duties, ensuring that their actions are lawful, just and aligned with both national and international norms. However, if in the past the International Humanitarian Law and the Laws of Armed Conflict made ethics principles seem clear enough, in the age of hybridity, distinguishing between ethical and unethical seems to become more and more difficult.

Being the sixth NATO recognized domain of warfare, alongside land, sea, air, space and cyber, cognitive warfare is a requirement for winning modern conflicts, since control of territories is not the most important anymore. Disinformation and information manipulation, using fear, uncertainty and doubt in order to amplify societal divisions, social engineering, bot networks, perception management, strategic deception and decision disruption and paralysis are just some of the tactics used in the operations of Cognitive Warfare. The ethical character of the previously mentioned is, at best, questionable. The military ethics in the age of hybridity must become, accordingly, more flexible or the moral compass of those responsible of deciding when and whether it is ethical to lead such demeanors must be not so accurate nor very demanding. It is difficult to correlate the new components of hybrid warfare with the principles of military ethics. Hybrid warfare usually operates in the "gray zone", making it difficult to have a clear distinction between wartime and peacetime conduct. Moreover, by involving non-state actors, private companies and civilians, the military interactions surpass formal armed forces. While traditional military ethics focus on minimizing physical harm and suffering through the protection of non-combatants, another controversy arises: even if the attacks on public opinions, morale and societal trust do not cause direct physical harm, they can have devastating consequences. From another point of view, military ethics depend on clear attribution of actions for responsibility and accountability. However, hybrid attacks often use deniability through the employment of proxy forces, fake identities and anonymous cyberattacks. The line between military ethical and unethical demeanor is, consequently, thinner and blurrier than ever.

In order to attempt to integrate these new military phenomena in the context of military ethics, the most effective strategy that can be approached is developing countermeasures against cognitive warfare in order to avoid being manipulated by the adversaries, in terms of perceptions, emotions and decision-making.

2.5 Resilience training. Resilience is defined as the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties. In a military context, resilience can no longer only refer to physical and virtual critical infrastructure. The cognitive domain must be included. Resilience training is a structured program designed to help individuals and groups develop mental, emotional and physical toughness in order to be able to more easily cooperate with stress, adversity and challenging situations. According to the Resilience Reference Curriculum (Lapsley & Vandier, 2025), military resilience training is designed to prepare soldiers for the psychological and physical demands of combat. Programs developed in the support of resilience training, such as U.S. Army's Master Resilience Training and NATO's comprehensive approach to resilience focus on enhancing mental toughness, strengthening effective leadership under pressure and maintaining operational effectiveness in crisis situations.

There are five levels of resilience: individual, community, organizational, national and multinational. The text of this paper focuses on resilience from an individual and organizational point of view. From a physical point of view, resilience concerns critical infrastructure, resources, networks, structures, or even how an institution is organized in terms of relationships, mechanisms and decision-making systems. The other element of resilience features psychological and emotional dimensions, concerning the determination and will to fight, civic duty, awareness and social cohesion.

The resilience process has four successive stages. The first is anticipation, where the individual has to observe, to identify and assess threats and prepare for them. The second one is managing, the stage where it is needed to effectively deal with the threat using support systems, resource allocation, coordination and information sharing. The third one is adapting, that comes after the crisis stage has passed and when the learning process can start, through cognitive understanding and behavioral shifts. The last one is recovering, where reflection can happen. Both the physical and psychological dimensions of resilience are closely interconnected, with each having the ability to influence the other. For instance, the state of physical infrastructure can affect mental well-being, just as psychological conditions can impact the use and perception of physical structures. Governments have a significant ability to shape the psychological resilience of their populations. However, while poor crisis management or a lack of transparency

can quickly erode trust and weaken psychological resilience, the process of building and sustaining trust and mental strength is far more complex and requires considerable time and effort.

According to the Master Resilience Training in the U.S. Army (J. Reivich *et al.*, 2011), the first operational and most important step in resilience training is building mental toughness by learning a series of skills that increase competencies. Soldiers learn to identify the link between activating events, their beliefs, and the resulting emotional and behavioral consequences. Through practical exercises, they recognize adaptive and counterproductive thought patterns. The program addresses explanatory styles and thinking traps that influence leadership and performance, helping soldiers detect cognitive errors like overgeneralization and develop strategies to correct them. It also focuses on recognizing deeply held beliefs ("icebergs") that can drive disproportionate emotional reactions, guiding soldiers in evaluating and adjusting these beliefs.

Energy management techniques, including controlled breathing and relaxation methods, are introduced to sustain resilience under stress. A structured problem-solving model teaches soldiers to overcome biases such as confirmation bias and to approach challenges systematically.

Training includes methods for minimizing catastrophic thinking by distinguishing between worst-case assumptions and realistic outcomes, and for challenging counterproductive thoughts in real time to maintain focus and performance. Finally, cultivating gratitude through daily reflection exercises reinforces positive emotions and strengthens interpersonal relationships.

The program emphasizes practical application of these skills to real-world military and personal situations, aiming to build long-term resilience and enhance overall psychological readiness.

All of these ways of developing resilience training programs for the military have been allowed to emerge by the advances in the cognitive research field. Modern developments in cognitive science have significantly deepened the understanding of how individuals react to stress, adapt to adversity, and maintain functional decision-making under extreme conditions. These findings have progressively shaped military resilience programs, enhancing both their theoretical foundation and practical methodologies to better prepare personnel for the psychological demands of contemporary operational environments.

One of the most impactful areas of research is in neuroscience. Studies on neuroplasticity have demonstrated that the human brain remains capable of restructuring itself even under conditions of intense stress. This insight has led to the development of training modules specifically aimed at reinforcing adaptive neural pathways. According to (Yanilov & Boe, 2020), military resilience programmes now incorporate exercises that target the cultivation of positive cognitive patterns, strengthen emotional regulation, and promote stress inoculation through repeated exposure to simulated adversities. By deliberately training the brain to adapt and recover, resilience programs build durable psychological defenses that enhance soldiers' performance under pressure.

In parallel, cognitive load theory has provided essential contributions to refining military training methods. Research has shown that excessive cognitive burden impairs decision-making and stress management, particularly in high-pressure situations. Consequently, military training curricula have been systematically adjusted to minimize unnecessary mental overload during instruction. Information delivery has been segmented, scenarios have been progressively structured to match cognitive capacities, and exercises have been designed to gradually build cognitive stamina. These adjustments ensure that personnel can process complex information more efficiently and maintain operational effectiveness even in cognitively taxing environments.

Behavioral psychology has also reshaped the approach to resilience training. Shifting from a reactive model, focused solely on coping with stress after the fact, modern programs now proactively cultivate traits such as perseverance, optimism, and emotional regulation. Frameworks like Growth Mindset and Grit Theory have been incorporated to encourage enduring motivation and adaptive emotional responses. As a result, behavioral interventions such as self-talk strategies, visualization techniques, and stress reframing exercises have become standard elements within resilience modules across many military forces. These techniques empower individuals to manage adversity proactively, rather than merely endure it.

From a doctrinal perspective, cognitive research has been increasingly integrated into formal military training frameworks, embedding psychological resilience as a critical capability. NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Resilience exemplifies this integration, emphasizing resilience as a multidimensional concept encompassing physical, societal, and cognitive domains. Cognitive resilience, in particular, is identified as vital for withstanding

disinformation campaigns, psychological manipulation, and other cognitive dimensions of hybrid warfare. Recognizing the centrality of the cognitive domain has led to the institutionalization of mental resilience within NATO's broader defense posture. Similarly, the evolution of Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) and emerging doctrines on Cognitive Warfare underscore the importance of mental resilience in safeguarding operational capabilities. These doctrines acknowledge that the psychological resilience of personnel is just as crucial as their physical protection. Advances in understanding vulnerabilities in information processing, as well as phenomena like emotional contagion, have informed the development of countermeasures designed to shield military personnel from influence operations. Targeted resilience-building initiatives now specifically address high-risk groups such as cyber operators, information analysts, and civil-military interaction teams, who are particularly exposed to cognitive threats.

Empirical evidence further supports the positive correlation between advances in cognitive research and the effectiveness of resilience training. Experimental findings, including neuroimaging studies, have revealed that individuals trained in resilience techniques exhibit different patterns of brain activation under stress, indicative of real neurological adaptation. These neurological changes correspond to improved emotional regulation, faster cognitive recovery after stress, and enhanced decision-making capabilities. Such findings validate the practical outcomes observed in operational environments, where personnel with resilience training demonstrate greater psychological durability and maintain performance even under extreme conditions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, In the context of the Age of Hybridity, cognitive dimensions of warfare have gained unprecedented importance, demanding a profound shift in military training, doctrines, and ethical frameworks. As hybrid threats continue to exploit vulnerabilities within the physical, virtual, and especially the cognitive domains, it becomes evident that traditional models of military preparedness are no longer sufficient. Psychological Operations and Cognitive Warfare, as integral components of hybrid conflict, have blurred the line between peace and war, adversary and ally, ethical and unethical conduct. Consequently, military resilience training must evolve, encompassing not only physical robustness

but also psychological and cognitive strength. Advances in cognitive science have significantly contributed to the design of more sophisticated and effective resilience programs, equipping military personnel with the tools necessary to withstand, adapt, and recover from hybrid threats. Integrating an understanding of cognitive manipulation and fostering resilience at all organizational levels will be crucial for preserving decision-making integrity and ensuring operational effectiveness. In this new era, developing cognitive defenses is as vital as maintaining physical and cyber security. Future military leaders must be prepared not only to recognize and resist cognitive threats but also to navigate the increasingly complex ethical landscape of modern conflict.

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EUROPEAN DEFENSE AND CURRENT HYBRID THREATS

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Abstract: European defense is a phrase with multiple meanings and the use of which is common in the current context, incorporating concepts, strategies and aspirations that have as core the security of the European Union. Taking into account the evolution it has had over time and the hybrid threats it is now facing, the question arises of the relationship in which the two find themselves, how they influence each other and the existence of tools to effectively combat them. In the analysis of the problem, qualitative research will be considered in order to understand both the circumstances present in which the European Union is placed and the role it plays in the modern hybrid war. Thus, the article outlines the European defense through the prism of contemporary threats, emphasizing the effects they have on European stability and noting the solutions existing in their management.

Keywords: defense; European Union; hybrid threats; instability; security

1. INTRODUCTION

The current international society is characterized by a combination of features such as volatility, uncertainty and fear, while providing new definitions of defense and resilience concepts, capturing the development of a new global security culture. In this mosaic of changes, hybrid threats play a key role in cultivating the imbalance of states, reversing the meanings of the fundamental values and principles of democracy, realizing a distortion of them by making them vulnerable.

European security, a necessity that has been constantly preoccupying the European Union (EU) since its inception, is presently at a crossroads, facing events that will determine its very essence in the future. The importance of the development of the military dimension of the Union is distinguished by reference to the narrative offered by the United States of America, the context of the war in Ukraine and the special circumstances in which international society is located. Thus, the EU's security environment faces challenges both internally and externally that have the capacity to weaken the cohesion and identity of the Union.

The article aims to analyze the hybrid threats facing the Union, both theoretically and practically, focusing on the initiatives of the Member States on the military sphere aimed at combating them and strengthening the resilience of the EU. The search will also relate to latest events that stress the obligation of States to enlarge their defense industry in order to develop capacities against the threats and risks they face and to implement vulnerability management policies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over time, hybrid threats have encompassed a wide range of notions and explanations through which a description of them was made. In a general characterization, these are destructive activities organized and carried out by state and non-state actors, the main purpose of which is to compromise stability in various areas by identifying and capitalizing on vulnerabilities. Among the best known are cyber-attacks, disinformation and threats with military force.

Hoffmann (2007/2010) defines hybrid threats as a mixture of conventional weapons, asymmetric tactics and violence to achieve the proposed result. The subject is represented by the states, but it also focuses on the analysis of non-state actors, following from a military perspective the existing interests that determine the different administration of threats in the context of conflict. At the same time, it focuses on tactical and operational actions in war, their coordination and the effects they have on the chosen objective. On the other hand, Cullen (2018) captures the concept of hybrid threats as a confusing element that makes it difficult to understand the situation and facilitates the state of

uncertainty through the diversity of ways of achieving and multiplying them, while making it difficult to identify them in the future. He embodies the idea as a puzzle game whose components combine, each of them having various seating possibilities for creating a different overview.

Giannopoulos (2020) highlights the expansion that hybrid threats have made over time by testing the European security environment, emphasizing technology as a special feature of the present with a clear role in the development of hybrid threats. At the same time, he notes the official EU documents highlighting various approaches (operational, strategic, etc.) on the subject. In addition, he captures the effects that factors such as globalization and the pace of development of artificial intelligence have facilitated the evolution of hybrid threats.

Finally, the topic approached is directly motivated by contemporary global trends, being a complex field that requires constant research and permanent reporting to technological developments.

3. HYBRID THREATS AND EUROPEAN UNION

If in mathematics there are formulas for finding the unknown "*x*" and solving the problem, in hybrid threats the calculation expressions have abstract values, multiple variables and different results. Although each state faces particular vulnerabilities, a wide range of common threats targeting European Union Member States is noted. The positioning of the hybrid threat concept within the EU does not limit the geographical area to a certain level, nor does it simplify the interpretation of the concept.

In 2016, the European Commission (EC) and the EU High Representative (HR/VP) approved a key document on hybrid threats, namely the communication Joint System for Countering Hybrid Threats: a European Union Response (EC, 2016). In the same year, the European Commission introduced initiatives to strengthen the EU's capacity to respond to threats. Thus, a general framework for them at EU level has been developed. The EU's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), approved in 2016, underlines the need for a relationship between the resilience of the Union and its external actions (EUGS, 2016) Following the adoption of the European Defense Action Plan by the EC, the European Council established the European Defense Fund (EDF).

In spring 2024, the Council validated the Guidance Framework for the practical establishment of EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams in the fight against hybrid threats[1]. Also at the beginning of last year, the European Commission and the High Representative adopted a Joint Communication on a new European Industrial Defense Strategy (EDIS, 2024) and the European Defense Industry Programme (EDIP, 2024). These measures accentuate the need for EU Member States to increase their defense capabilities to improve and develop the military field.

According to the European Defense Agency (EDA) Annual Report (2024), projects such as the autonomy of the Remote Pilot Aircraft System *(RPAS)* and collaborations for the development of unmanned autonomous vehicle (*UAV*) and drone technologies began in 2024, for the purpose of intensifying EU capacities. Isaac Diakite, the Project Officer Air Superiority, emphasizes that

> integrated air and missile defense is a complex and multifaceted issue that is fundamental to any successful defense strategy (EDA, 2024:12).

Thus, the foundations on which the defense plan is built are highlighted, having a clear understanding of the existing resources, the probability of success of the projects and the risks existing in their implementation.

As regards defense, capacity building for EU resilience is vital to countering these threats. In this respect, it is necessary to focus the defense industry on modern technologies that determine investments in systems and prototypes. Thus, the European Union has developed the concept in its official documents over time, setting its principles, priorities and interests, while relating to the trends of the international security environment and featuring the vision, directions of action and means of achievement in the field of European defense.

4. CHANGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Currently, European Union Member States are targets of hybrid threats. The latest defense investment statistics show that defense spending in 2023 amounted to 1.3% of GDP for the EU (Eurostat, 2025), as shown in Figures 1 and 2. This demonstrates a general awareness of the need to

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[1] The Strategic Compass for Security and Defense was the basis of the hybrid toolkit for the development of new means of detection and response to them.

develop the defense industry in order to maintain European security.
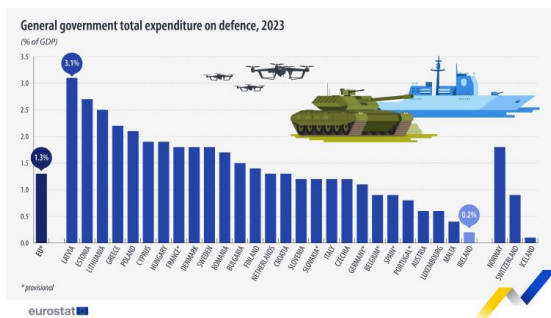
Fig.1: General government total amount on defense, 2023 (% of GDP) [source: Eurostat]
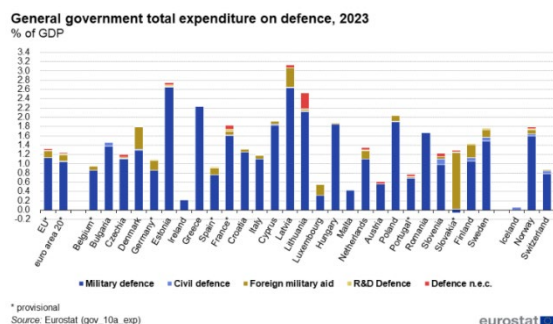
Fig. 2: General government total investment on defense, 2023 [source: Eurostat]

From this point of view, there is a development in investments in the defense industry of the Member States aiming at increasing their capacities and resilience to threats.

In order to stimulate the European defense industry, the Franco-German binomial proposes a new product under the Main Ground Combat System, namely the MGCS tank (DIE, 2025), in order to replace the Leclerc tanks of France and the Leopard *2* of Germany. The Swedish defense company SAAB is engaged in the formation of new European defense capabilities by introducing its Globaleye Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft as a replacement for the American aircraft Boeing E-3 Sentry (AWACS). Among their main objectives is the possibility of identifying the ships and aircraft that are found in the area of the Scandinavian Peninsula and the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, the Swedish government shows substantial involvement in the war in Ukraine through the new military aid package (about 1.39 billion euros) to strengthen Ukrainian air, naval and ground capabilities. Poland is considering building munitions factories to support the arms industry. Among the upgrades, there are also M1A2 ABRAMS SEPV3 tanks (Cătălin, 2025), that emphasize the technological

development that the Polish state wants in its defense industry.

The Orka Program of the Netherlands that involves the modification of submarines by modernizing them with sonar systems produced by THALES. The Danish defense ministry stressed the need for technology in the country's naval forces through the new project to acquire warships, drones, etc. to increase security in the Baltic and North Sea areas (FMN, 2025).

The world's largest sovereign fund, the Norwegian[2] government fund, is being considered for investment in Norway's defense industry. In addition, the Norwegian government has announced that it will contribute 4 billion crowns to the procurement of artillery ammunition used by Ukraine on the Czech initiative to support it (Government.no, 2025). Poland, Estonia and Norway are among the European countries that have chosen to buy K9-Type Korean howitzers to strengthen their defense industry. Also, in partnership with Hanwha, a factory will be built in Romania to fabricate K9 Thunder howitzers and Redback fighting machines, the final goal being to turn it into an industrial hub. Table 3 shows the above-mentioned projects by the EU member states, organized according to the area in which the weapons development is carried out.

Table 1. EU member states' projects on the develop ment of the defense industry

EU countries	The field of defense	Defense industry development projects
Franco-German binomial	Earth space	*MGCS TANK*
Sweden	Airspace	*AEW&C*
Poland	Earth space	Modernization of land forces
The Netherlands	Maritime space	*ORKA PROGRAM*
Denmark	Maritime space	Modernization of naval forces
Estonia	Earth space	Modernization of land forces

In the presentation of the White Paper for European Defense – Readiness 2030 and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said that

[2] Norway is not a member of the European Union, but is in an active partnership with the latter.

the era of the peace dividend is long gone. The security architecture that we relied on can no longer be taken for granted. Europe is ready to step up. We must invest in defense, strengthen our capabilities, and take a proactive approach to security (DIS, 2025).

The EC president stresses the need to prioritize the development of the European defense industry in relation to the dynamics of international society and the role that the European Union plays in this context. Moreover, it is noted that Member States are resonating with this orientation towards defense investments, in EU values and objectives in order to create a proper framework for its consolidation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The European Union is facing unprecedented events such as disinformation, cyberattacks and interference in the electoral process of states by hostile actors, who have the ability to change current social, political and economic trends, the complexity of these contemporary hybrid threats is determined by the novelty and uncertainty of the present.

The article theoretically analyzed the concept of hybrid threats, capturing some Union documents that led to more effective management of actions to combat risks and reduce vulnerabilities, aiming to increase EU capabilities. Also, the projects on the development of the defense industry of the Member States were emphasized, noting at a general level the attitude they approached regarding the European security, which is a priority in the present context. For the European Union to succeed, it is essential to identify threats and finance their removal capacities, harmonize policies and coordinate defense spending, at both EU and state level. Moreover, it is necessary to continuously improve the legal instruments in order to relate to the requirements of the current security environment that is under the sign of technology. In the end, the European Union's role in countering hybrid threats is fundamental, as it has the capacity and resources to counter action, and is closely linked to the defense industry of the Member States that make it up.

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CLASSIFYING RUSSIAN PSYOPS AND COUNTERMEASURES: IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY

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Abstract: *This research examines the role of psychological operations (PSYOPS) in the Russian-Ukrainian war, analyzing their integration into Russia's broader military strategy and assessing their alignment with NATO's doctrinal criteria for PSYOPS. The research follows a qualitative methodology, combining content analysis of NATO doctrines, open-source intelligence (OSINT), and case studies of Russian PSYOPS operations. The study first establishes the conceptual and doctrinal framework of PSYOPS, considering its function in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) environment, which shapes the unpredictability and adaptability of psychological warfare. Subsequently, the research explores how Russia's PSYOPS align with NATO doctrine, identifying key deviations and their strategic implications. The study also evaluates the effectiveness of Ukrainian countermeasures in mitigating the operational impact of Russian PSYOPS, focusing on resilience and military adaptation. A critical approach for data analysis is applied, cross-referencing multiple sources to mitigate information bias and ensure accuracy. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the operational effectiveness of PSYOPS in hybrid warfare and the challenges associated with counteracting such strategies in modern conflicts.*

Keywords*: PSYOPS; hybrid warfare; OSINT; military strategies; NATO doctrine*

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary security environment has undergone profound transformations, driven by technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, and the increasing prominence of non-kinetic strategies in conflict. Traditional warfare, centered on territorial control and military dominance, has gradually given way to hybrid approaches that integrate conventional operations with psychological, informational, and cyber dimensions. These developments have reshaped how states engage in strategic competition, making perception management and cognitive influence central to modern security frameworks.

Psychological operations (PSYOPS) have been employed in military strategy for decades, evolving alongside changes in warfare. While their historical roots can be traced to propaganda efforts and psychological influence in earlier conflicts, the systematic application of PSYOPS gained prominence in the 20th century, particularly during the Cold War. The development of mass media, and later digital communication platforms, has expanded the reach and effectiveness of such operations, allowing state and non-state actors to engage in large-scale influence campaigns that transcend traditional military engagements.

In recent years, the resurgence of geopolitical competition has been accompanied by an increased reliance on PSYOPS as an instrument of power projection. The war in Ukraine has underscored this trend, highlighting the role of psychological operations not only in direct military engagements but also in shaping public perception, influencing political decision-making, and destabilizing adversaries. Russia's use of PSYOPS in this conflict represents a continuation of its broader hybrid warfare strategy, raising concerns about the implications for regional security and the effectiveness of existing countermeasures.

In this context, the study examines the categorization of Russian PSYOPS and the strategies developed to counteract them. By assessing their role within the broader security landscape, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of contemporary conflicts, where the battle for influence is as crucial as traditional military capabilities.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the role of PSYOPS within Russia's military strategy by examining how these operations have been integrated into broader efforts to manipulate perceptions and destabilize Ukraine's internal resilience, while also assessing the extent to which they align with or diverge from NATO's established criteria for psychological operations. This analysis will identify key deviations and their strategic implications, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of Ukraine's countermeasures in mitigating the operational impact of Russian PSYOPS.

Beyond this central objective, two secondary objectives guide the research. The first is to identify and analyze the key psychological techniques and information manipulation tactics used by Russia and verify the degree to which they adhere to NATO's PSYOPS doctrine. Where deviations exist, the research will explore how and why Russian methods differ from NATO's approach. The second objective is to assess Ukraine's response, focusing on the measures adopted to counteract these operations and determining their effectiveness in mitigating the intended psychological and military effects.

To address these objectives, the research explores two primary questions: (1) First, to what extent do Russia's PSYOPS campaigns in Ukraine align with NATO's doctrinal definition of psychological operations, and where do they diverge? and (2) Second, how effective have Ukraine's countermeasures been in neutralizing or minimizing the operational impact of Russian PSYOPS?

The study follows a qualitative methodological approach, integrating multiple research methods. Content analysis serves as the primary method, applied to official documents, military doctrines, and open-source intelligence (OSINT) sources. This facilitates an assessment of Russian PSYOPS by cross-referencing their implementation with NATO's doctrinal criteria. Additionally, qualitative OSINT research provides insights from digital platforms, media sources, and governmental statements, allowing for a contextual understanding of the evolving landscape of psychological operations.

Before engaging in the core analytical process, the research considers how PSYOPS operate within a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) environment. This conceptual framework is particularly relevant to understanding the adaptability and unpredictability of modern warfare. The uncertainty surrounding the effectiveness of information operations, the complexity of multi-layered disinformation campaigns, and the ambiguity regarding public and military reception of PSYOPS messages all contribute to the broader context in which these operations unfold.

The methodological implementation begins with content analysis to establish the doctrinal and strategic foundations of PSYOPS. This will be followed by an in-depth examination of specific operational cases, supported by OSINT findings that capture the real-time evolution and effectiveness of these campaigns. The research will employ case studies to illustrate key PSYOPS initiatives, including Russia's recruitment campaign, the large-scale mobilization effort through the Moscow rally and the use of loudspeaker-equipped TIGR armored vehicles and ZS-88 BTR-80 platforms to transmit fear-inducing messages to Ukrainian forces. These cases will provide empirical examples of how PSYOPS have been structured, disseminated, and adapted over time, allowing for a deeper understanding of their function within the broader hybrid warfare strategy. Additionally, they will be analyzed through NATO's doctrinal lens to assess their alignment with established PSYOPS principles or their divergence toward alternative psychological warfare tactics.

A critical approach is applied throughout the study, recognizing the challenges posed by information bias and the operational objectives underlying various sources. Since both Russian and Ukrainian PSYOPS aim to shape perceptions and influence actions, systematic cross-checking is employed to verify the accuracy of data and minimize bias. This approach enables a balanced assessment of both offensive and defensive dimensions of psychological operations.

Data collection is based on publicly available materials, including official government documents, military publications, media archives, and OSINT.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN OPERATIONS IN UKRAINE

Since 2013, Russia has progressively transitioned from conventional military engagements to a hybrid warfare model that integrates PSYOPS, cyber warfare, economic coercion, and political subversion. This shift became particularly evident in Ukraine, where a sequence of hybrid operations was employed to

weaken state institutions, erode public trust, and prevent the country's integration into Western security structures. The strategic recalibration of Russia's foreign policy during this period (Tsygankov, 2013: 207-210) marked a departure from direct territorial conquest toward a model of influence projection that relied on information dominance and destabilization efforts.

The first large-scale implementation of hybrid tactics in Ukraine began in late 2013, coinciding with the Euromaidan protests (DeBenedictis, 2021: 78). As demonstrations intensified following the suspension of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (European Commission, 2013), Russian-controlled media platforms launched extensive psychological campaigns aimed at discrediting the movement. State-funded outlets such as RT and Sputnik disseminated narratives portraying the protests as a Western-engineered coup (EUvsDISINFO, 2021), reinforcing divisions between pro-European and pro-Russian segments of Ukrainian society. These psychological operations were complemented by economic pressure (Wierzbowska-Miazga and Sarna, 2014), including the suspension of trade agreements and energy supply disruptions, which sought to increase internal instability and force the Ukrainian government to realign with Moscow.

Following the fall of President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014, Russia escalated its hybrid operations, leading to the annexation of Crimea. Unlike previous territorial acquisitions, this operation relied heavily on psychological manipulation and information warfare to shape public perception. Russian forces operating without official insignia, occupied key infrastructure while state-controlled media framed the intervention as a humanitarian mission to protect Russian-speaking populations (Ashby, 2022). Parallel to military actions, local pro-Russian political figures organized a controlled referendum under coercive conditions, leading to the annexation of Crimea in 18 March 2014 (Putin, 2014). The psychological impact of these operations was significant, creating a rapid shift in public sentiment that facilitated the Kremlin's territorial objectives while minimizing immediate military confrontation.

The annexation of Crimea was followed by the destabilization of eastern Ukraine, where hybrid tactics were employed to fuel separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk. Psychological operations played a central role in legitimizing Russian-backed paramilitary groups, with extensive media campaigns portraying the

Ukrainian government as hostile toward Russian-speaking populations (Moser, 2014: 146). During this period, disinformation campaigns intensified, spreading claims of alleged atrocities committed by Ukrainian forces. These narratives, widely disseminated through Russian and local media channels, contributed to the erosion of Ukrainian state authority in the region and fueled the armed conflict in Donbas. The psychological impact extended beyond Ukraine's borders, as Russian influence operations targeted European audiences to generate skepticism regarding Western support for Kyiv, reinforcing narratives of internal corruption and political instability.

By 2015, Russia had further refined its hybrid approach, integrating cyber warfare with psychological operations to undermine Ukrainian state institutions. In December 2015, a cyberattack attributed to Russian-backed groups targeted Ukraine's power grid (Grumaz, 2017), causing widespread outages in Kyiv and western regions. The psychological dimension of this attack was evident in its timing and execution, aiming to instill fear and uncertainty regarding Ukraine's ability to protect its essential services. Similar cyber-enabled psychological operations continued in subsequent years, including coordinated disinformation campaigns during the 2019 Ukrainian presidential elections (Ukraine Election Task Force, 2019), where Russian actors sought to amplify political divisions and undermine public confidence in democratic processes.

From 2016 to 2021, hybrid operations were increasingly focused on economic pressure and the amplification of domestic unrest. Russia employed trade restrictions, energy supply manipulation, and economic coercion to weaken Ukraine's financial stability. Simultaneously, information campaigns sought to exploit societal divisions by amplifying dissatisfaction with government policies and economic hardships. These efforts were aimed at undermining public trust in state institutions and fostering internal instability, making Ukraine more vulnerable to external influence. One of the most significant coercive strategic maneuvers occurred in November 2018, when Russian naval forces seized Ukrainian vessels in the Kerch Strait, presenting the event as a provocation by Kyiv (IISS, 2021: 11). This operation combined kinetic action with psychological influence, aiming to present Ukraine as the aggressor while reinforcing Russia's strategic control over the Black Sea region.

By 2022, Russia had escalated from hybrid operations to a full-scale invasion (Putin, 2022), but psychological and hybrid tactics remained

central to its military strategy. In the early phases of the conflict, Russian PSYOPS aimed to create a rapid collapse of Ukrainian resistance, spreading disinformation that Kyiv had already surrendered and that key officials had fled the country. Digital influence campaigns attempted to manipulate social media platforms, generating panic and misinformation regarding military engagements. On the battlefield, psychological pressure was exerted through targeted strikes on civilian infrastructure, aiming to weaken public morale and create internal pressure on Ukrainian leadership to negotiate.

Despite the scale of these hybrid and psychological operations, their effectiveness diminished as Ukrainian resilience increased. The population, having experienced nearly a decade of Russian hybrid tactics, demonstrated a higher resistance to disinformation, and Ukrainian countermeasures became increasingly sophisticated. Government-led Strategic Communication (STRATCOM) efforts, international support in cybersecurity, and the decentralization of media narratives contributed to countering Russian influence. Additionally, Ukraine's military employed its own psychological operations to sustain morale, counter disinformation, and diminish the impact of Russian efforts to instill fear and division.

The evolution of Russia's psychological and hybrid operations in Ukraine since 2013 illustrates a strategic transition from direct military intervention to an influence-based model that leverages information warfare, cyber operations, and psychological pressure as primary mechanisms of control. The long-term consequences of this shift have extended beyond Ukraine, influencing European security policies and reinforcing NATO's focus on resilience against hybrid threats. While these operations have demonstrated initial effectiveness in destabilizing adversaries, their diminishing returns in Ukraine suggest that psychological resilience and strategic countermeasures can significantly reduce their impact over time.

4. A DOCTRINAL APPROACH TO PSYOPS

PSYOPS represents a critical instrument in contemporary military and STRATCOM frameworks. They function as a force multiplier by shaping perceptions, influencing behaviors, and supporting broader political and military objectives. While PSYOPS share certain characteristics with other influence operations, particularly disinformation campaigns, they are distinct in their purpose, execution, and integration within military doctrines. Establishing clear differentiations between these concepts is essential for analyzing their application in hybrid warfare and, specifically, for assessing the alignment of Russian PSYOPS with NATO standards.

According to MC 402 (NATO, 2003: 2) and AJP-3.10.1(A) (NATO, 2007:1-1), PSYOPS are defined as

> planned psychological activities using methods of communications and other means directed to approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives.

TAA/TES= Target Audience Analysis/ Test & Evaluation Section
DISSEM = Theatre Dissemination
PDC = Product Development Centre
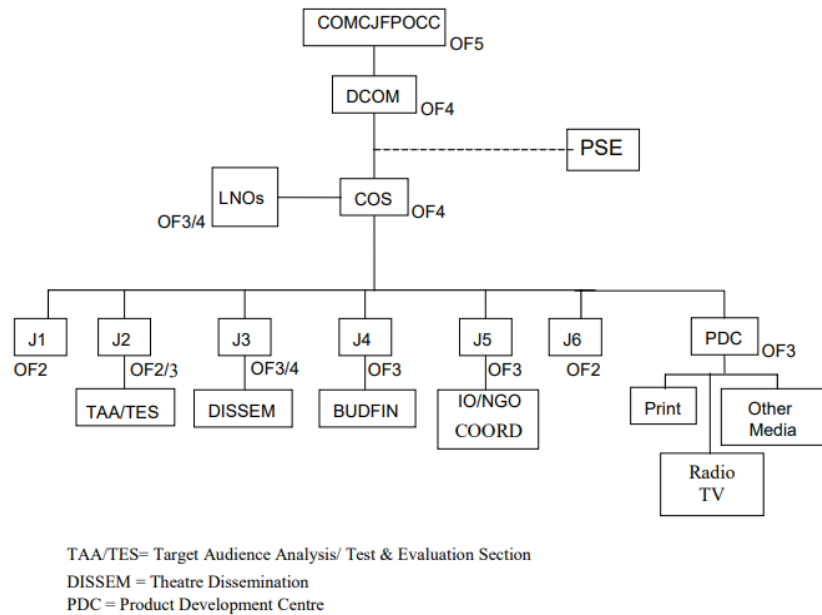
Fig.1. CJFPOCC structure (NATO, 2007: 3 - 3)

Unlike disinformation campaigns, PSYOPS are structured, systematically implemented, and require approval at a strategic level. Their primary function is to support military operations by directing psychological influence toward specific target audiences, ensuring coherence within the broader framework of STRATCOM. Additionally, PSYOPS can involve kinetic actions, as military force is often used to reinforce psychological measures, creating a tangible impact on the adversary's perception and decision-making processes.

The Combined Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (CJFPOCC) is a key component of NATO's doctrinal approach to PSYOPS (see Figure 1), ensuring their integration into military campaigns (NATO, 2007:3-3). It is responsible for planning, coordinating, and executing PSYOPS at multiple command levels, maintaining consistency and strategic alignment with operational objectives.

The HQ Staff oversees operational guidance, target audience analysis, and the development of PSYOPS materials, while also coordinating with civilian agencies to align efforts with STRATCOM goals. The Product Development Centre (PDC) produces print, audio, and audiovisual content, ensuring adaptability to mission requirements. The Dissemination Section guarantees product delivery under all operational conditions. Liaison elements play a crucial role in embedding PSYOPS into broader joint operations, ensuring 24-hour situational awareness and coordination across military components.

A fundamental characteristic of PSYOPS, as defined by NATO (NATO, 2007), is the requirement for attribution. Disseminated materials, whether in the form of print, audiovisual, or digital content, must be officially attributed to an approved source. This ensures accountability, strategic coherence, and alignment with broader military and political objectives. PSYOPS require clear attribution to maintain credibility and to reinforce the intended psychological effect on the target audience.

In contrast, disinformation campaigns involve the deliberate spread of false or misleading information through various channels, with the objective of manipulating perceptions, influencing opinions, and shaping decision-making processes (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2019:282). These efforts often rely on deceptive narratives, manipulated visuals, and digital platforms to amplify their reach, creating a distorted reality that has long-term political and societal implications. While disinformation campaigns can be employed as a component of PSYOPS, they do not encompass the full range of psychological influence tactics that fall under PSYOPS domain.

Additionally, disinformation campaigns can function independently (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2019:282), whereas PSYOPS operate as an essential element of STRATCOM, requiring higher levels of approval and integration within state-directed military frameworks. Disinformation campaigns may be deployed across political, economic, and social domains (Wright, 2025:71), while PSYOPS are applied in a military context and are considered fundamental to strategic deterrence. A critical distinction is that PSYOPS can integrate kinetic actions, reinforcing

psychological effects through military means, while disinformation campaigns remain within the domain of information manipulation alone.

Given these differences, PSYOPS enable NATO to amplify the effects of its military capabilities by directly influencing target groups. This contributes to soft power projection, particularly in regions where traditional military engagement may not be viable.

For a systematic comparison, the core characteristics of PSYOPS and disinformation campaigns have been extracted to an analytical table (see Table 1), which will serve as a reference point for assessing Russian operations in Ukraine post-2022.

Table 1. Doctrinal and operational distinctions between PSYOPS and disinformation campaigns

Criteria	PSYOPS	Disinformation campaigns
Objective	Influence perceptions and behavior to achieve military and political goals	Manipulate information to distort reality and influence decision-making
Target audience	Specific, defined audience within operational parameters	Often broad and undefined, targeting general populations
Integration	Part of STRATCOM	Can be employed ad hoc without direct military coordination
Use of false information	Can use selective information but does not rely solely on deception	Relies primarily on the spread of false or misleading narratives
Application context	Military and security-related environments	Can function independently across various domains
Use of kinetic actions	Can include kinetic operations to reinforce psychological effects	No direct use of kinetic force, relies solely on information manipulation
Attribution	Must be attributed to an official source	Often anonymous or falsely attributed to unaffiliated sources

5. CASE STUDIES

One of the earliest large-scale Russian PSYOPS campaigns in 2022 focused on military recruitment, initiated in March. This operation targeted a young demographic, using media and digital communication channels to promote military service under favorable conditions. Disinformation tactics reinforced narratives of NATO aggression, positioning military enlistment as both a duty and an opportunity (Dylan *et al.*, 2022:144). Official Russian government statements aligned with these recruitment efforts, underscoring national security threats and the necessity of military mobilization. Promotional materials, such as the Military Mortgage Brochure issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense (Gielewska *et al.*, 2022), highlighted financial incentives, reinforcing the psychological appeal of military service. The internal dissemination of these materials had an external destabilizing effect, suggesting a prolonged military engagement and shaping Russia's mobilization strategy.

Beyond recruitment efforts, Russia employed additional psychological influence strategies to shape public perception and sustain support for its military actions. One significant example was the March 18, 2022, rally in Moscow, where Putin sought to display national unity in support of the invasion (AP, 2022). The event commemorated the annexation of Crimea and reinforced the justification for military operations in Ukraine. Positioned before a banner stating "for a world without Nazism" (Lynch, 2022) Putin's speech framed the war as a necessary intervention against external threats. This event was a classic example of mass psychological mobilization, utilizing nationalist sentiment to sustain public support for the ongoing conflict.

Another PSYOPS initiative involved the deployment of loudspeaker-equipped TIGR armored vehicles and ZS-88 BTR-80 platforms to transmit messages to Ukrainian forces on December 27, 2023 (ISW, 2023). Delivered in Russian and Ukrainian, the broadcasts warned of continuous airstrikes, artillery barrages, and drone attacks, presenting surrender as the sole chance of survival. These transmissions took place along the Dnipro River, in the Donbas region, intensifying psychological pressure on Ukrainian troops.

Ukraine responded with a PSYOPS campaign designed to discredit Russian recruitment strategies. Mirroring the methods of Russian operations, Ukraine disseminated targeted content portraying the Russian military as ill-equipped and disorganized. Ukrainian media sources framed the conflict as one where Russian troops faced inevitable failure, a message encapsulated in a

widely distributed official recruitment poster stating, "There will be only one response to Russian troops – hatred and contempt. And our Armed Forces will inevitably come" (Interfax, 2022). The campaign sought to undermine Russian military morale while strengthening domestic and international support for Ukraine.

Another significant psychological operation conducted by Ukraine targeted Russian prisoners of war. On March 2, 2022, Ukraine publicly invited the mothers of captured Russian soldiers to retrieve their sons (Luxmoore, 2022), highlighting inconsistencies in Russian narratives.

On March 18, 2022, another psychological operation gained international attention when Ukrainian media reported that a demoralized Russian soldier surrendered his tank in exchange for $10,000 and the opportunity to apply for Ukrainian citizenship (Kesslen, 2022:00:03-00:22). In this context, Ukraine's Minister of Internal Affairs stated that "the Russians are giving up" (BBC, 2022:00:01-00:34). This operation leveraged both psychological and material incentives, exposing Russian military dysfunction and providing an alternative to enemy troops.

Deception operations also played a role in battlefield tactics, with Ukrainian forces employing kinetic measures to mislead Russian troops. Images from Kharkiv revealed the deployment of decoy mannequins dressed in military uniforms, equipped with fake weapons to deceive Russian forces into misallocating resources (India Today, 2022:00:26-00:34). These tactics, coupled with targeted disinformation campaigns, sought to induce strategic miscalculations.

Ukraine's countermeasures to Russian PSYOPS extended beyond individual campaigns. Since 2016, Ukraine had invested in specialized military structures for psychological operations, culminating in the establishment of the Special Operations Forces (SOF). Within this framework, the 72nd Center for Information and Psychological Operations played a key role in formulating counter-narratives and disrupting Russian influence efforts. In 2017, Ukraine formalized the Doctrine of Information Security (President of Ukraine, 2017), integrating PSYOPS within national defense planning. However, the effectiveness of these efforts was challenged in February 2022, when the Russian military targeted and destroyed the 72nd Center's headquarters, emphasizing the importance on controlling the psychological battlespace.

The reviewed case studies illustrate the extensive role of psychological operations within the Russia-Ukraine war. Russian PSYOPS efforts prioritized recruitment, intimidation, and mass mobilization. In contrast, Ukraine's PSYOPS sought to undermine Russian military cohesion, disrupt enemy morale, and amplify domestic resistance.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The analysis of Russian PSYOPS in Ukraine reveals four key deviations from NATO's doctrinal framework: attribution, target audience specificity, integration with kinetic actions, and reliance on disinformation.

Unlike NATO, which requires official attribution for PSYOPS materials, Russian operations rely on unofficially state-controlled media, proxy organizations and dispersed digital sources to obscure their origins while shaping narratives. In terms of audience, Russian influence campaigns target broad and diverse groups, aiming to influence political attitudes and disrupt societal stability. Regarding kinetic military actions, Russia employs strikes and intimidation tactics to influence adversary perceptions; however, these actions are not systematically coordinated with psychological campaigns, resulting in a fragmented approach. In terms of the nature of information used, Russia primarily relies on false and distorted narratives, particularly in recruitment campaigns and portrayals of Ukrainian military weaknesses.

These findings highlight that Russian PSYOPS do not align with NATO's doctrinal principles. Instead, they operate within a broader hybrid warfare framework, blurring the lines between military strategy, political influence, and psychological manipulation.

In contrast, Ukraine's PSYOPS fully align with NATO doctrines, demonstrating a commitment to attribution, integration with kinetic actions, and adherence to strategic messaging discipline. The research shows that Ukraine has effectively countered Russian psychological operations through rapid narrative control, audience-specific campaigns, and psychological resilience within its broader military strategy.

The ability to disrupt, counteract, and replace adversarial narratives has been essential in neutralizing the impact of Russian operations. However, the Russian targeting of Ukraine's 72nd Center for Information and Psychological Operations highlights the importance of securing and decentralizing strategic communication capabilities in hybrid warfare.

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Communities & Intercultural Communication

UNDERMINING MEDIA CREDIBILITY, A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract: *In recent years, the Romanian media has been facing a decline in credibility, a situation that has a negative impact not only on media institutions, but on the entire Romanian society. Freedom of expression is a constitutional right for every citizen of the state and, at the same time, an essential principle of democracy. However, to a very large extent, over the last few years the media in Romania has come to the attention of international organizations for excessive politicization, corrupt funding mechanisms and editorial policies subordinated to various interest groups, political parties or foreign entities. Therefore, transformed into a lucrative business and without a rigorous legislation to regulate journalistic activity in Romania, media institutions represent a vulnerability to democracy and state security. International organizations specialized in monitoring human rights have referred in their reports of recent years to serious lapses in media activity in Romania. The present article aims to analyze, on the one hand, the levers that have led to the undermining of the credibility of Romanian media and, on the other hand, how this phenomenon has turned into a threat to national security. The purpose of the article is to identify ways to reduce the exposure of Romanian society to misinformation and manipulation and to reconsider the legislative framework regulating journalistic activity in Romania. The conclusions of the article refer to increasing social responsibility towards the sources of information which are used and the return of the media to its primary role of informing, to the detriment of current manipulative practices*

Keywords*: credibility;media; security; threats*

1. INTRODUCTION

The politicization of the media has become a real threat to the freedom and pluralism of press institutions not only in Romania, but also at the European level. The scourge that tends to increasingly threaten the "fourth power in the state" has generated concern even within the European Council, which, in March 2024, adopted the *European Media Freedom Act.* This

> establishes a common framework for media services in the EU internal market and introduces measures to protect journalists and media service providers from political interference while facilitating their work beyond the EU's internal borders (EC, 2024).

Designed as a protective measure for journalists and their sources, the beneficial effects of the law, in its adopted form will, however, also be felt by the general public consuming journalistic products. Political interference in the editorial decisions of both private and public media service providers, combined with the reinterpretation of the economic dimension of the media system by the journalistic product providers themselves, have led in recent years to a departure from the main functions of the media, as defined in the literature. As numerous reports of international organizations show, the politicization of the media system has been the main slippage that has led over time to compromising the credibility of the media outlets. An example of this is the situation in Romania during the 2024 election year, when the forced imposition of controversial figures as models in the public space, validated by financial availability and not by intellectual and professional potential, culminated in an electoral Potemkin spectacle, pushing the population into a real spiral of silence, in the purest sense of the concept theorized by the German researcher Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann.

This has created a vacuum of trust around the media, and consumers have turned to the alternative of social networks, where every user can become an opinion former, disseminate unverified information and, implicitly, manipulate masses of people. In 2024, according to the Digital News Report, the largest academic study of news audiences in the world, coordinated by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the

University of Oxford, Romania recorded the lowest level of trust in the press in eight years, at 27%, compared to 32% in the previous year Reuters Institute, 2025). The loss of contact of official communicators with the masses, along with the questioning of their authority due to the media's deontological slippages are creating security breaches and jeopardizing the very credibility of the state in the eyes of its own citizens. We will therefore approach the subject proposed for this article, from a theoretical perspective, considering two aspects: the media and national security; the human being and the state will be reference points for both of them.

2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ROLE AND TYPOLOGIES OF THE MEDIA

Taking as precursors of what we call today the media cave paintings and inscriptions on stones, considered to be the first levers for disseminating information to large groups of people, press historians define as a decisive moment in the evolution of this field the emergence of the printing press in the 15th century, created by the German inventor Johannes Gutenberg, a moment to which the first printing presses are linked. The evolution of the media has been a constant process over time, from the first periodicals in the 17th century to the advent of the telephone and the telegraph in the 19th century, culminating today with the digital revolution and the emergence of social networks.

The simplest definition of media refers to the totality of technical means of mass communication of information (radio, television, cinema, publications, etc.). As for the functions of the media, these are, in a broad form accepted by current theories, information, persuasion, motivation and interpretation, education and transmission of social and cultural heritage, socialization, leisure and entertainment. In relation to the role of the media in society, many scholars have oscillated over the years between different configurations of media models. For this article, we have chosen the most simplified approach, namely the two major philosophical paradigms - the liberal model and the authoritarian model - an approach advocated by R.E. Hiebert, D.F. Ungurait and T.W. Bohn, as presented in Professor Mihai Coman's paper *Introduction to the Media System*:

A liberal political philosophy will hold that the individual is the most important entity in society;

the state, the government, and the press exist to serve the needs of the individual. If they (the institutions - n. M.C.) do not respond to those needs, the individual can change them. An authoritarian political philosophy will argue that there is a higher order that exercises authority over individuals. This higher order may be represented by the church, the state, a political leader, a teacher or a parent. In an authoritarian society, the individual exists only to serve the needs of these higher instances" (R. Hiebert *et alii, 1991,* p. 589).

In Professor Coman's opinion, the benchmark for presenting the social role of the press remains, however, the typology proposed by Siebert Peterson and Schramm, which assumes the authoritarian model, the communist model, the liberal model and the public service model, an extended approach of the paradigm advocated by R.E. Hiebert, D.F. Ungurait and T.W. Bohn. Both the liberal model and the public service model, to which we also refer to the Romanian media, are centered on the individual, the man, the consumer of journalistic products. The relationship between the press and the institutions of Power boils down to the support that the latter should provide to the media in order to inform the public as objectively as possible, without interfering in editorial policies.

In close connection with the topic addressed in this article, we will further dwell on the theoretical considerations regarding the typology of press institutions. According to Professor Mihai Coman, they can be categorized according to their purpose, i.e. commercial press institutions, profit-oriented, and non-profit, public service institutions, depending on their political position, i.e. neutral or partisan, and depending on the medium through which they disseminate their messages, divided into two broad categories, the written press and audiovisual. In the light of Professor Coman's theory, the independence of commercial press institutions must be understood in relative terms. These institutions are not financially dependent on state authorities or political groupings, but they do depend on the "reactions and whims of the public", which may require them to promote certain ideologies or trends. The influence of the public is thus exercised directly, with institutions responding to the needs of the individual.

In a democratic society, the media outlets play an essential role in the public space. Whether we think of them as the "fourth estate" or the "watchdog of democracy", at least in theory, they are the benchmark for accurate information for the population and, at the same time, the agora of the people.

3. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

From a legislative point of view, even if in Romania media activity requires a more elaborate set of provisions to protect both media institutions and their beneficiaries (the population), freedom of expression and the right to information, which were won after 1989, are mentioned in the Constitution, which provides the premises for legislative initiatives in this respect.

According to the Romanian Constitution, freedom of expression is an inviolable right, censorship is forbidden, freedom of the press also implies the freedom to establish publications and no publication may be suppressed. At the same time, in order to prevent slippages and interference by state or non-state, national or foreign entities in the activity of press institutions, the Constitution also stipulates that "the law may impose on the mass media the obligation to make public the source of their funding", an important aspect which is not, however, taken into account in practice.

With regard to the right to information, Romanian citizens can have access to any information of public interest, public authorities are obliged to ensure that citizens are correctly informed about public affairs and matters of personal interest, and public and private media are obliged to ensure that public opinion is correctly informed. Public radio and television services are guaranteed autonomy by the Constitution. An important aspect laid down in the Romanian Constitution, which links with the next chapter of this article, is that "the right to information must not prejudice measures for the protection of young people or national security".

The media are, therefore, not only a benchmark of correct information, but also an essential lever for strengthening or, as the case may be, a means of weakening national security.

4. SECURITY. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Whether approached sequentially or as a whole, in academic or political circles, by researchers or policy-makers, security still endures numerous definitions and interpretations, but all of them share a common denominator: it continues to be one of the most fundamental problems facing humanity. Commonly associated with military and political factors during the Cold War, security has subsequently been approached in new ways. The pragmatism of the studies and of the many definitions that scholars have tried over the years has been strongly challenged by the empirical context which has forced the emergence and acceptance of new perspectives on the dimensions of security. The military and political dimensions have thus been complemented by the economic, environmental and societal dimensions, with the new scholarly approach to security belonging to the renowned international relations professor Barry Buzan and the Copenhagen School. However, Prof. Buzan argues that, in general, the concept of "security" has remained a fluid, "incompletely developed", immature concept in the field of modern science, and from this perspective he offers a number of explanations for its continued conceptual underdevelopment, including the complexity of the term, the partial overlap of the conceptual areas of the terms "security" and "power", the revolts against "realist orthodoxy", "the nature of Strategic Studies which as a sub-domain has produced a large body of empirical literature in military policy issues" (Buzan, 1991/2017:46-47) and the internal rationales for maintaining the symbolic ambiguity of the concept:

> The term itself is in general use in international relations and other disciplines and seems to be accepted as a central organizing concept by practitioners and academics alike. But the literature on it is very uneven. A large amount of work is on the empirical side, dealing with contemporary national security problems and solutions. Most come from the sub-domain of strategic studies, where security is a central normative focus. The foreign, military and economic policies of states, their intersection in areas of exchange and dispute, as well as the structure of relations they create, are all analyzed as aspirations for ensuring national and/or international security (Buzan, 1991/2017:39-40).

As with the notion of security, the element of reference is also carefully and intensely debated. "Whose security?" asks Buzan in his book *People, States and Fear*. The reference point can be defined in terms of different variables. We are talking about both individual security and national security, but without overlooking a universally accepted reality: the interconnectedness of the two. As, regardless of the debates that any empirical or theoretical approach to security generates, the basic assumption from which they start is that security refers to the "absence of threats" (Arnold Wolfers, *apud* Buzan, 1991/2017:54), to "the absence of armed attack and coercion, the absence of internal subversion, and the absence of erosion

of political, economic and social values that are essential to quality of life" (National Defence College, Canada, *apud* Buzan, 1991/2017:54). The point of reference may therefore be the individual (the individual entity) or the state, but each may at some point pose a threat to the security of the other. The state guarantees to individuals "their lives, liberties and property", but as it gains power it can itself become a threat to the individual, as Buzan points out. However, research shows that no matter how powerful the state becomes as a source of threat, the individual perceives any threat from the state as considerably less strong than threats that occur in the absence of the state.

The individual remains, however, the core around which the concept of security is built, a concept that extrapolates to national and international levels, also because it is based on the needs of individuals. And the need for security felt by the individual can be, as Buzan recalls by invoking the dictionary definitions of security, protection from danger, the feeling of security, the absence of any doubt (Buzan, 2017:73). It is no less true, however, that the individual himself can pose a threat to national security. We are talking about the constitution of groups of individuals whose beliefs (political, cultural, religious, identity) exceed social norms, and endanger other individuals and implicitly the state. Such individuals are transformed into a vulnerability which, depending on the (in)capacity of the state to manage it, may arouse the interest of other (state or non-state) organizations outside their borders, which share their beliefs or wish to take advantage of the uncertainty and vulnerability of the state of

reference and whose influence may lead to the spread of insecurity this time on a much wider scale. The slippages of such individuals can thus be exploited, encouraged and harnessed to the detriment of the national security of the state from which the individual originates.

The exponential increase in the danger that these individuals present is done in the public space, promoting their beliefs through the media or, more recently, on social networks. The responsibility of the media industry is even greater in such situations, as media outlets, journalists, have a duty to filter information, analyze messages and communicators and not to harm national security.

5. ROMANIAN MEDIA, BETWEEN DUTY TO PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL REGIMENTATION

In 2024, Romania reported its lowest level of trust in the press in eight years, according to the annual Digital News Report survey coordinated by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. Also in the 2024 election year, numerous journalistic surveys have revealed increased pressure from political parties on newsrooms and a non-transparent funding mechanism for media outlets, often from public money. "Lack of transparency in media funding, especially by the state, and market difficulties undermine the reliability of information and trust in the media," says the "Reporters Without Borders" report in the chapter on Romania.
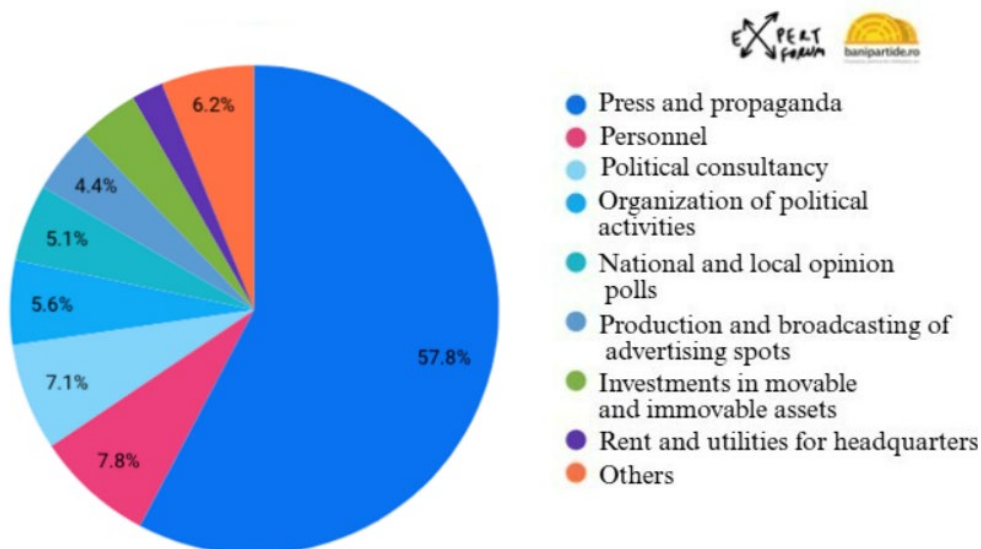
Fig. 1 The state funding, *apud* Expert Forum

The state funding referred to in numerous reports represents, in fact, the money that reaches the media from political parties. According to a report by Expert Forum, the Permanent Electoral Authority transferred 386 million lei (about 77 million euros) to political parties in 2024, of which 371 million lei was spent in the first 11 months of the year. As the Expert Forum's analysis shows, the largest sums were spent on press and propaganda, amounting to no less than 214 million lei (about 44 million euros, or 57.8% of total spending).

The lack of transparency on the part of both political parties and media outlets, however, prevents the public from finding out the truth about this mechanism of funding the media with public money, a mechanism criticized by the same media in other cases with other beneficiaries. In an attempt to document the financing of the electoral campaign for the 2024 European Parliament elections, the non-governmental organization ActiveWatch and the investigative publication Snoop have requested information from Antena 3 CNN, România TV, Realitatea Plus and Digi24 on the costs of broadcasting interviews and debates with candidates of the main political forces in Romania (PSD-PNL Alliance, AUR Alliance and United Right Alliance). All four media outlets refused to answer ActiveWatch's questions, the only one that was transparent was Prima News, who confirmed that the cost of broadcasting an interview with a candidate conducted by a journalist amounted to more than €80,000. Political parties have not been more transparent in this case either. PSD, PNL and AUR have refused to officially respond to Snoop journalists' requests regarding the election campaign expenses for the above-mentioned news channels. However, Snoop's journalists got an unofficial answer from AUR, according to which the party has concluded a promotion contract for that campaign only with Realitatea Plus, worth about 2 million euros.

ActiveWatch and Snoop's analysis concluded that

> the opacity of most major parties and most TV news broadcasters in terms of how public money is spent on election campaigns impacts the health of the media ecosystem and at the same time affects the right to accurate information for citizens (ActiveWatch, 2024).

The transfer of journalists' image capital to politicians/candidates/political parties in fake journalistic products, not properly branded as election advertising implicitly leads not only to the discrediting of the media institution, but also of the journalist.

From a security point of view, these media slippages are reflected in the public's reluctance to receive any information of public interest transmitted through these channels and the population's tendency to turn to other sources of information, to other state or non-state actors whose interests do not converge with the official ones. Also, the creation of a parallel agenda to the one supported by the media can generate chaos in the public space, an example of this being the presidential elections of 2024, a dangerous precedent from all points of view and, for the time being, unsatisfactory officially argued to make the media institutions aware of the role they played in generating the situation and to convince public opinion of the danger of losing the two essential values provided for by the supreme law of the country: freedom of expression and the right to information.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In 2024, Romania reported its lowest level of trust in the press in eight years, according to the annual Digital News Report survey coordinated by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. Also in the 2024 election year, numerous journalistic surveys have revealed increased pressure from political parties on newsrooms and a non-transparent funding mechanism for media outlets, often from public money. "Lack of transparency in media funding, especially by the state, and market difficulties undermine the reliability of information and trust in the media," says the "Reporters Without Borders" report in the chapter on Romania.

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ROMANIAN-HUNGARIAN RELATIONS IN MIXED COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS IN SFÂNTU GHEORGHE

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Abstract: *his paper studies the patterns of intercultural communication between Romanians and Hungarians living in Sfântu Gheorghe, a city from Covasna County in Romania. It aims to identify the nature of the relations of these ethnic communities, revealed in their communicational behavior, as a basis for societal cohesion. The study is based on Dell Hymes's (1997; 2001) SPEAKING framework, operationalized in the autochthonous environment by the second author who previously studied the intercultural communication patterns in rural areas from Romania (2015), and on data collected by the first author through participant observation and interviews with both ethnic Romanians and Hungarians living in the city. The data collection took place in four different periods dedicated to the fieldwork, in the months of January, February and March 2024. The paper seeks to offer an emic perspective of Romanian – Hungarian intercultural relations, as the studies of these relations were rather developed on ethic coordinates. The results of the research show the non-conflictual nature of these relations, the formation of cohesion within the local community, which is not however lived homogenously by the participants, being still impacted by the historical memory and present-day developments which still maintain a suspicion on the non-acceptance by the "different other".*

Keywords*: SPEAKING; ethnography of communication; intercultural communication; cohesion*

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of intercultural relations in societies with a background of ethnic conflict is of great relevance in the contemporary European security environment, where ethnic nationalism and far right groups are gaining momentum, often exploiting the cultural and ethnic diversity of the states. In Romania, Hungarians form the most numerous ethnic minority, relatively encapsulated in different regions or counties, which often makes their interactions with the Romanian majority outside of these areas scarce. The lack of interactions impacts the perception of the "different other". Thus, the history of the relations, politics, information space representations and everyday ethnicity play a big role in shaping and understanding the current rapports between Hungarians and Romanians in these communities.

In general, the study of intercultural relations in Romania was developed on etic coordinates, mainly describing the history of the conflicts, often with a heavy focus on the primacy of the ethnicities on the territory that is nowadays shared by these communities. Interethnic tensions were not common since the very beginning of the cohabitation (dated before the 13th century, as shown by documents originating from those days), as ethnicity did not play such a preeminent role as other forms of identification, such as those tied to the economic status. The later "birth" of ethnic nationalism and people's increased attachment to their ethnic identity was a drive for interethnic animosities in this part of Europe. As Anthony D. Smith argued (1998, 1) nationalism had a great role in nation-state building, appearing at the end of the 18th century in Western Europe and America as an inclusive and liberating force that gave people the sovereignty and right to self-determination, forming states based on common popular will. The nationalistic ideology was then meant to maintain autonomy, unity and identity amongst the people identifying with the existent or potential nation (Smith, 2000:796). However, in

Eastern Europe, the nation formed in different circumstances, with the people living in polyethnic empires, dominated by three main ethnicities – Russian, Ottoman and Austrian. After the fall of empires, nationalistic factions fought for autonomy and independence, often through forced processes of transforming the "different other", which led to strong resistance against the attempts of homogenizing cultures (Smith, 1986:131-145). The threats to which the ethnicities were subjected in Eastern Europe, including nowadays Romania, have enhanced their attachment to their ethnic identity, which set the foundation for interethnic conflicts.

The current identities of Romanians and Hungarians from Transylvania, influencing nowadays interactions was modelled by two events, as explained by the sociologist Irina Culic (2001:228-229). The first was Romania's unification in 1918, followed by a nation-building process based on homogenization, and amalgamation, while the second was the communist regime with its imposed institutional modelling of nationality. One of the reactions of the Hungarian elites, to these modelling forces affecting the ethnic minority, was the creation of the *"Transylvanism"* ideology (Brubaker *et al.,* 2006:75), that differentiated the Transylvanian identity from the state imposed one.

The study of Romanian and Hungarian intercultural relations on emic coordinates was less explored in Romania. Several authors described these relations as asymmetrical. Brubaker *et al.* (2006:240-241) pointed the asymmetries regarding language use. While the majority of Hungarians are bilingual, that is rarely the case for Romanians. Such asymmetries set different expectations and norms, and nurture "language ideologies" (Tánczos, 2018). While the Romanians consider it natural for everybody to speak Romanian, the Hungarians perceive that naturality means passing their own language from one generation to another, beliefs which become part of the local culture. Brubaker *et al.* (2006:235) argued that ethnic Hungarians distinguish between Romanians in Transylvania and those leaving outside of the Carpathian arch, feeling closer to the first, whom they consider different. Similarly, some of the Romanians in Transylvania, participating in the authors' research in Cluj-Napoca, stated that they feel closer to Hungarians in their vicinity than to Romanians living in the south, considering the latter somehow "behind" when it comes to living standards, culture and civilization.

Mixed Romanian-Hungarian communities in Romania are places where historically, ethnic tensions and conflicts were lived more acutely. Thus, our inquiry seeks to understand the intercultural relations in these communities as a basis for societal cohesion and societal security, through an emic perspective, examining the patterns of intercultural communication in the ethnically mixed city Sfântu Gheorghe, from Covasna County, a place where the Hungarian inhabitants form the ethnic majority. Through our research, we seek to observe through unmediated means the interactions between Romanians and Hungarians following the intercultural communication patterns, which we believe to reveal predispositions that drive the behaviors of the interlocutors.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical approach and framework. We believe that an appropriate demarche for the study of intercultural communication is offered by cultural anthropology. If in the past this field was rather focused on the study of exotic places, modern anthropologists, such as Marc Augé (1987), brought the field to the contemporary world. From the multiple objects of study of anthropology, we turned our attention to communication itself, choosing as a method the ethnography of communication proposed by Dell Hymes (1997/2001). Hymes supported the need for a theory of language focused on its use, different than the study of grammar, that studies the communication patterns adequate in different contexts. His theory is grounded in sociolinguistics through the attention given to the organization of verbal means and the ends to which they serve. The anthropologist believed that sociolinguistics does not bring its contributions to science or society without being materialized in a descriptive model (1997/2001:178). Hymes' theory makes a connection between linguistic and psycho-social elements, and thus the way of speaking refers to knowing the communication behavior practiced within a community. In the theoreticians' view a speech community is defined tautologically as a community that shares knowledge on language use and interpretation. In this community, the "fluent" speaker knows both what to say but also how to say it in different contexts of interaction (1997/2001:46-53, 123).

In our endeavor to explore the intercultural communication between Romanians and Hungarians, we followed Dell Hymes (1997/2001: 16-17) mnemonic schema "SPEAKING", as operationalized by Lesenciuc (2015) in our

autochthonous environment, by studying the patterns of intercultural communication in Romania's multicultural rural areas. Hymes (1997/2001) proposed new components of communication, adding ethnographic taught to the classic processual communication schema. The components were further described and developed, by Lesenciuc in his previous research (2015), offering an applicable model of analysis for intercultural communication patterns. The SPEAKING schema, provides a suitable theoretical model for understanding communication in context, referring – by components, to the following:

a) "S" stands for "setting" – the time and place where the communication acts take place and the physical circumstances; and "scene" – refers to the psychological frame of a conversation, that could be either formal or informal.

b) "P" stands for "participants" – which do not resume only to sender and receiver but includes as well all those present to the conversation – including listeners and other audiences.

c) "E" refers to "ends" including both purpose-results or finalities and intended purposes of the communication.

d) "A" stands for act, understood as speech acts that contain the shape and content of the message. The shape in this case refers to the way that something is said, while the content refers to the topic and its change throughout the conversation.

e) "K" stands for "key" and its evaluation, from a *paloaltist* perspective, means delineating between analogical and digital communication, but also analyzing non-verbal elements of prosody (intonation, emphasis) and paralinguistic (tone, volume, speech speed and errors in pronunciation) (Lesenciuc 2015, 88-89).

f) "I" – the "instrumentalities" encompass the channels of communications, but also the organization of linguistic means, including dialects and variations of the language used. As pointed out in Lesenciuc's previous study (2015:89-90), when describing the instruments of communication it is important to follow the intelligibility of the interlocutors as well, while using the language or dialects, but also to look at individual variables of affective, cognitive and behavioral nature, when analyzing speech acts.

g) "N" - stands for "norms" of interaction and interpretation. The interaction norms refer to what is appropriate to do (or not) while communicating, while the interpretation rules encompass that which the participants perceive as habitual in the communication overall, in terms of tone or distance between interlocutors. While analyzing norms, the following elements should also be assessed: the way in which speakers perceive interruptions in communication, active listening and active engagement in the communication.

h) "G" - the "genre" of communication is understood as the type of act speech (i.e. discussion, demonstration, conversation, explanation etc.). While Hymes explained briefly that the "genre" refers to a prescribed way of communication, Lesenciuc (2015:92-93) proposed establishing the genre by considering criteria such as: the status of the partners in communication, the time and place of the discussion, the textual organization and material support, but also the discursive ends.

2.2 Type of research and research design. As the aim of our research is to study the patterns of intercultural communication in a mixed Romanian-Hungarian community, we employed a qualitative approach with the purpose to explore in depth the nature of interactions, without seeking to generalize the results. The suitable method for such an endeavor is descriptive and interpretivist in nature, seeking to understand and increase the level of knowledge on the quality of intercultural relations in Romania. This imposed restraining the research to a limited space. Our choice was Sfântu Gheorghe city, from Covasna county in Romania, primarily because it is characterized by a mixed Romanian-Hungarian ethnic composition, with the latter being dominant. Secondary, the choice was due to the fact that the first author is a native from this area (who does not live there any longer) a condition which facilitated the fieldwork. Given the importance of the context in studying communication and our theoretical approach to the inquiry, the following questions guided our demarche:

Q1: What is the role of the cultural context on the predispositions and patterns of intercultural communication for the Romanian-Hungarian community in Sfântu Gheorghe?

Q2: How do the intercultural communication exchanges take place in the Romanian-Hungarian community from Sfântu Gheorghe?

Q3: Which are the patterns and limits of intercultural communication for the Romanian-Hungarian community in Sfântu Gheorghe?

The universe of our research is represented by mixed Romanian-Hungarian communities in Romania where the two ethnicities coexist, but especially those communities where the

Hungarians make up the ethnic majority. In such settlements the ethnic dominance allows for the Hungarians an encapsulation and the status of "unmarked" (Brubaker *et al.,* 2006:211-212) ethnicity, which, by Kiss (2018:229) explanation, does not need to get out of its own world in order to socialize.

Our approach to the study, characterized by an emic perspective, was transversal, as the data was collected through participant observation and interviews with representatives from both ethnicities, during the periods when the researcher planned these activities in the field. While the units of analysis and recording were the participants to the communication acts, the object of our analysis was the rapports established in intercultural communication. The procedure of our observations was peripheral, as we participated to the everyday life of the community through listening, watching, and recording the details of interactions, without seeking to obtain a role in communication.

The type of interviews we preferred were intensive – interviewing a small number of respondents, while preferring thematic depth; non-directive – orienting the conversation on open questions; unstructured in its application, but semi-structured in its projection (as we used as an instrument of research an interview guide); unique, personal, face-to-face and documentary. Such an interviewing procedure, informal and conversational, known also as "ethnographic interview", bears according to Patton (2002, 342-349) advantages such as increasing the relevance of questions during the interview by constructing them as the conversations progress, but also of adapting the question to the respondent. Its disadvantages could consist of collecting different or incomplete answers, the time needed for getting the answers, but also a potential greater workload in collecting and analyzing the data. We mitigated these disadvantages by preparing thoroughly for each interview. The respondents were selected through a non-probabilistic and non-aleatory approach, ensuring adequate candidates for our research inquiry.

We applied the participatory observation procedure based on the SPEAKING observation sheet, and the interviews based on the SPEAKING interviewing guide, which were two instruments already operationalized by Lesenciuc in his previous study (2015), derived from Hymes SPEAKING schema, that we adapted to our research field and inquiry. The observation sheet contained the elements that Hymes proposed observing: Setting and scene (with its physical and psychological facets), Participants (transmitter, receiver, third parties), Ends (considering the purposes-outcomes and purposes-goals), Acts, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms of interaction and interpretation and the Genre. The interview guide contained 8 topics of discussion corresponding to the SPEAKING observation sheet, 16 sub-topics and 40 questions, out of which 6 were dependent on responding to previous questions.

3. PATTERNS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN SFÂNTU GHEORGHE

3.1 Sfântu Gheorghe local community – an overview. Nowadays intercultural communication between Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe requires an understanding of the evolution of these interactions in the multicultural space inhabited by the ethnicities.

Sfântu Gheorghe is situated geographically in Covasna County, at the eastern side of Gurgău mountain peak (Baraolt mountains), in the depression of Brașov. The city in the current shape formed from the unification of two villages which developed on the Debren and Simeria streams, overflowing in the Olt River which crosses the city. One of the villages bore the name of today's city, while the second – Simeria, is at present, one neighborhood in Sfântu Gheorghe. The habitation of the territory where the city is located dates from several centuries before our era, as the discovered archaeological sites reveal. Of those, we mention the inhumation tomb belonging to the Scythian population, believed to be dating from the sixth or fifth century BC, or archaeological materials – including silver coins belonging to the Dacian epoch, believed to be dating from the first century BC or first century AD (Lăcătușu, 2021:37-39).

As we learn from the remarkable monographic paper of the city written by Pál Judith (1999), the first documentary mention of Sfântu Gheorghe dates from 1332, while reference to the settlement as *oppidum* (fair) from 1461. Certain factors had a significant role in the development of the *oppidum.* From an administrative perspective, the nowadays city was the center of the Sepsi seat, while from a military perspective – its location gave the settlement different military roles. The latter condition also represented a setback in the development of the city, which prevented the formation of a bourgeoisie. Certain other conditions and rivalries also slowed down its economic development, among which we

enumerate: the proximity of the city of Brașov that saw Sfântu Gheorghe *oppidum* as a competitor; the rivalries with other Seats, which did not want to recognize the settlement among those which had privileges; the instability of the decisions of the rulers, whom gave different statuses to the city in terms of independence in relation with the Seat, different tax policies, but also more or less military obligations. Then, in the second part of the 18th century, under Maria Theresa, the ruler of the Habsburg empire, the Szekler Seats were organized in border regiments, receiving duties that the inhabitants unsuccessfully opposed. This brief chronicle of the city's evolution shows that until the 19th century the major tensions from Sfântu Gheorghe were due to other factors than ethnicity, mainly of economic origin. In the second part of the 19th century the industrialization of the city begun, while also the educational system started developing.

Between 1920 and 1921, following the Great Union of 1918, the integration of the city and of the Treiscaune (Three seats) county in Romania from an administrative point of view, took place. After this integration, the dynamics of the political environment impacted both the ethnic composition of the city, but also the status of the ethnicities and their participation in public life. Initially, ethnic Romanians were also appointed in the public administration and education, but this changed shortly after the Vienna Dictate, when the city was once again part of Hungary (1940-1944). Under the Horthy administration, many rights of the Romanians were forbidden, coupled with a forced assimilation, while several discriminatory policies were applied (it included changes of Romanian denominations in the city and interdictions of language use in the public life). In 1944 for a short period (September to November) the city was once again under Romanian administration, which was changed for a Hungarian one, following claims of anti-Soviet positions of the national union government Sănătescu and Rădescu. The period that followed until the withdrawal of the Hungarian administration from Transylvania in 1947 was marked by violence between Romanians and Hungarians. From 1950 the city was part of the Stalin Region, later between 1952-1960 from the Autonomous Hungarian Region and between 1960 to 1968 from Brașov Region. In 1968, after a reform in the public administration which divided Romania by counties, Sfântu Gheorghe became the Seat of Covasna County (Lăcătușu, 2021:55-93).

Similar to the trends at the national level, the industrialization of the city was pronounced between 1968-1990. After the fall of communism, as in other cities in Romania, privatizations took place, but also many factories were closed. Only small industries continued functioning, especially in the textile and food industries. This meant for many of the inhabitants a need to change professions and emigrate for jobs.

When it comes to the city's ethnic composition, since its establishment Sfântu Gheorghe was characterized by multiculturality. The coexistence of Romanians and Hungarians is attested primarily through military chronicles, as the Szeklers and Romanians are mentioned to have fought together against Tatars and the Mongols as early as the 18th century. Later, the fluctuation of the ethnicities was determined by several factors, especially of an economic nature. Starting from the 19th century, the first testimonials on interethnic tensions were documented. Of those we mention Romanians' complaints in the 1850's, who claimed that the rights won in 1848 Revolution were not implemented. The beginning of animosities on ethnic grounds are believed to be dated from those times, when the Romanians were also gathered in the city's square and constrained to change their religious affiliation. The writings of the Orthodox Church in Sfântu Gheorghe also stand as testimony to specific interethnic conflicts. There are of course contrary perspectives, one belonging to the preeminent Hungarian historian, politician and promoter of the *Transylvanism* ideology, Kos Károly, according to whom in Ardeal, none of the ethnicities (including the Saxons) attempted to change „the other" (Pop, 2002:222). The existence of ethnic animosities before the 19th century cannot be however excluded.

Different processes contributed to shifts in the ethnic composition of the city. As documented by Romanian archivists (Ranca *et al.*, 2021: 233-235) in 1850, 457 Romanians lived in Sfântu Gheorghe (including Simeria), while the census showed there were 2302 inhabitants overall (Lăcătușu, 2021:49). In 1931, particularly because of industrialization, the number of inhabitants grew to 10.181, out of which 6.664 Hungarians, 2.497 Romanians (Lăcătușu, 2021:59). Until 1966 the numbers doubled, and later both due to Ceaușescu's policies who wanted to increase the number of Romanians in the region, but also due to the growing industrialization – which determined Hungarians as well to migrate to the city, the population grew to 68.359 inhabitants in 1992, out of which 16.092 Romanians and 51.073 Hungarians (Lăcătușu, 2021:109). The dynamics of the inhabitants in the city after the 1989 Revolution showed a decrease

of both main ethnicities, for the Romanians being more pronounced in the immediate post-December '89 developments. Lăcătușu (2021, 101) speaks about the existence of a so-called „anti-Romanian" atmosphere in the city after the Revolution, which was not however confirmed during our interviews with the respondents, except for specific limited experiences, that some of the interviewees remembered. Currently, the results of the 2021 census (National Institute of Statistics 2021) show that the city has 50.080 inhabitants, out of which 9.480 Romanians (18,93%), 34.678 Hungarians (69,52%) and 0.50% other ethnicities, while there were no data for 11,29% of the inhabitants. By contrast to 2011 national census, the population shifts were not significant in the city.

In more recent times, several events that happened in the city, with a potential to generate inter-ethnic tensions can listed:

a) Conflicts regarding the hoisting of the Hungarian flag, usually conducted at a political level, between the office of the mayor and the office of Covasna county's prefecture (Covasna Media 2018), (Rador 2021).

b) The conflict between Sfântu Gheorghe mayor's office and the Civic Forum of Romanians from Covasna, Harghita and Mureș counties, in the quest to have approved a flag for the city that bears Szekler symbols (Agerpres 2023).

c) The definitive decision of the Court following a lawsuit started by the Civic Association for Dignity in Europe in 2019, which imposed the mayor's office to modify the bilingual denomination from the façade of the Hungarian Theatre „Tamási Áron", as the Hungarian writing „szinház" (theatre), should have been written under the Romanian writing and not on the same row with it according to the law (We Radio 2023).

These events did not materialize in manifest tensions among the city's inhabitants. During our interviews, the respondents showed a general knowledge of these issues, while believing they are politicized, and that mutual respect should prevail.

3.2 Patterns of intercultural communication between Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe. We conducted the participatory observation, by using the SPEAKING observation sheet, assisting intercultural exchanges manifested in public areas, ranging from shops, markets, cafeterias, restaurants, to beauty salons, cinemas, religious and cultural institutions (theatre, church, library). As the observation was limited to the available contexts of interaction, we made sure that the chosen interviewees were well acquainted with

the intercultural dialogue and relations in the city, being able to explain and refer to situations that might have not been otherwise noticed. We dedicated four periods for the observation and interviewing activities, as follows: 20-24.01.2024, 08-10.02.2024, 29.02-02.03.2024 and 07-09.03.2024.

We interviewed, based on the SPEAKING guide, four key respondents and then persons that they indicated, with various professions and occupations (i.e. police officer, photographer, network technician, lawyer, beauty worker, journalist, economist, student, cook, housewife). In total, 18 respondents (10 ethnic Romanians and 8 ethnic Hungarians) took part in our interviews, out of which 15 were part of a network, similarly to the approach used by Lesenciuc in his previous study (2015). The other three were interviewed outside of the network, which was not built due to the refusal of indicated persons to participate in the research or because they were less engaged in recommending somebody. The interviews were conducted after the interviewees signed a GDPR consent, recorded and then transcribed by using *Speechmatics* AI solution and manually corrected. We coded the responses by using MAXQDA qualitative analysis software. The interviews lasted on average 30 minutes. As there were variations in the respondents' options in terms of anonymity, we chose not to refer to their profession/initials/name while referring to the insights they provided.

Based on the gathered data, by following the SPEAKING framework, we will now turn to analyzing the patterns of intercultural communication between the Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe:

a) **Setting and scene:** The cohabitation of ethnic Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe is characterized by continuity for more than eight centuries. The ethnic composition and industrialization that took place starting the second part of the 19th century involved the construction of dwellings to accommodate the working class, which favored the ethnic mélange, determining the ethnicities to live in vicinity. The separation of the ethnicities in the city is partly realized through the institutions, which are created based on language use as an ethnic marker, sustaining a "Hungarian world" which is however incomplete (as there are institutions in the city known as "Romanian", which require Hungarians to know the state language). It is less common for Romanians to frequent Hungarian institutions, mainly because of the linguistic asymmetry, but also given the option to frequent their own. From a spatial and temporal

perspective, the intercultural communication between the ethnicities is continuous, taking place most frequently in professional environments, public areas and between neighbors, while the dominant frames of interaction are informal. There are of course exceptions, as it resulted from the insights provided by our respondents, of inhabitants who do not want or avoid the interaction with the "different other", which are however believed to be a minority. Considering the changing nature of the socio-professional environments, we remarked the existence of interethnic communication also between ethnic Hungarians from Sfântu Gheorghe and Romanians residing in other areas. They are favored by "work from home activities" or other types of collaborations with "the exterior" driven by the particularities of the workplaces. The psychological predispositions (scene in Hymes' schema) of the ethnicities remain in various degrees impacted by transgenerational beliefs, but also daily situations. They sustain a certain level of suspicion on the non-acceptance by "the other", and to a lesser extent variations of ethnic mistrust that are most likely dictated by the level of socialization at an individual level with the other ethnicities, as it resulted from the discussions with the respondents. Transylvania's fate after the 1st World War and ethnic identity played throughout the time a great role in setting the psychological predispositions. The first is seen as a historical disadvantage for Hungarians, which should however be accepted as it is, while for Romanians it represents the materialization of the common will of the people. Self-identification plays for ethnic Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe a great role, being characterized by a mosaic of representations. Some see themselves as Szeklers – but the explanation for this identity is associated by most respondents with the territory inhabited by a certain group of Hungarians. Others believe however that it is an archaic identity which has transformed, or rather a group of Hungarians that underwent more hardships in their history which shaped their mentality differently, making them in some way more "clever". Hungarians' identity is also challenged by their rapports with the kin state and the host state, with some arguing that they are not entirely accepted by none. Respondents from both cultures pointed out that rather allogenous elements are trying to nurture inter-ethnic conflicts, but also that the situation from the Szekler area is seen and projected outside of the environment in a distorted and exacerbated way. For ethnic Hungarians, such perceptions are

experienced with feelings of alienation with the Romanians outside of their close environment. The daily, non-conflictual and frequent interactions between the ethnicities in Sfântu Gheorghe, as conditioned by the urban calendar, that are generally taking place normally (and less with frustration or embarrassment because of language barriers) favored an openness of the ethnicities towards each other, that was produced slowly but resulted in the formation of cohesion among the local community. Intimate relations of friendship and mixed families also impacted the scene, favoring a certain level of cultural openness. This openness is not ideal but seen with hope for the younger generations. Conservatory views of middle-aged and late adults – rather common among the Hungarian community was recognized by some of the respondents. However, the level of education and socialization outside of the Szekler area with the Romanian society is believed to be positive for improving intercultural dialogue, while there is also awareness on divisive elements (political projects, aspirations of certain groups and the mainstream media representations of the situation at the local level).

b) **Participants:** The intercultural communication between the Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe is taking place with normality at the observable level, without attitudinal differences induced by the ethnicity of the interlocutor. The function of communication is dependent on the context. Thus, everyday interactions in vicinity, between acquaintances and even in professional environments are governed by the phatic function – people communicating for the sake of maintaining contact. In occasional encounters with an unknown interlocutor the dominant function is informational, the interactions being conducted in a transactional manner. From a processual perspective, communication is characterized by the model SaRa (active Sender, active Receiver), representatives of both ethnicities alternating in the role of one or the other. There are, however, situations when the receiver is passive because he cannot express himself in the other's language. In such cases, the intervention of an intermediary to facilitate the conversation is common, if one is present. Given the dynamics of communication in the urban environment, such cases are frequent in Sfântu Gheorghe, language intermediation being asked for or accepted in order to reach effectiveness in communication. The "default" mode for greeting a client in Sfântu Gheorghe is oftentimes Hungarian, but if the client responds back in Romanian (a common practice in

Sfântu Gheorghe), the conversation continues in his language. Ethnic Romanians in Sfântu Gheorghe do not experience a cultural shock when being greeted in Hungarian, perceiving it as habitual, but it is probably lived by Romanians passing by Sfântu Gheorghe. However, if the communication code is not changed, even if the interlocutor knows the language of the other, it can lead to frustrations and sometimes understood as malice, but conflicts are generally avoided.

c) **Ends**: Intercultural communication is characterized by efficiency in day-to-day interactions meant to maintain contact, language barriers being overcome and intelligibility reached. In transactional communication, sometimes language barriers could affect in case of both ethnicities reaching the desired purposes. Such examples were given by respondents when referring to interactions with clerks of certain institutions who are not bilingual. In such cases, without the intermediation of a third party the requests may not be met. The intended purpose of communication may sometimes be to verify the openness and limits of "the other" when engaged.

d) **Acts**: The topics of intercultural communication do not bear the ethnic mark, but there are limits, as certain subjects are avoided if considered tabu or when generally known there is disagreement on some issues. Between friends and family such barriers are however surpassed, but also rather more among youth. Communication is characterized by an acceptable level of convergence; the thematic and linguistic limits being known and respected. While intercultural communication is conducted predominantly orally, digital communication is common as well, with the most popular platforms being Facebook and WhatsApp. In the case of the first, interethnic animosities can be observed, which are seen differently by respondents. While some argue they are not congruent with everyday oral interactions, others believe that they offer a place for those who don't have the courage to express what they believe. In digital communication, difficulties in using the other's language are common, and thus automated translations are said to be employed.

e) **Key**: Different non-verbal means of communication are not observable among the participants in the intercultural communication. Living together for so many centuries, the cultures have aligned elements of proxemics or kinesics. The tone of communication is rarely accompanied by ethnic lenses, and jokes are allowed if mutual respect prevails. Between friends or family ethnic jokes are also allowed. Seriousness is an expected key in certain communication contexts, especially with middle and late adults of Hungarian ethnicity, who are perceived as more conservative, their attitudes being justified by resistance to assimilation and to cultural changes. In digital communication, offensive speech is sometimes used towards the other ethnicity, when sensitive topics are discussed, on which there's ethnic disagreement.

f) **Instrumentalities**: Given the linguistic asymmetry, most often interethnic communication is conducted in Romanian. It is more common for ethnic Hungarians to be bilingual, even if the language is spoken with grammatical errors by those who studied in Hungarian. The use of words from the other's language is also common, both in interethnic and intra-ethnic contexts, which is done because of the easiness of expressing certain ideas, or for not knowing the equivalent in one's own language – especially for ethnic Hungarians in professional contexts. Hungarians' bilingualism is favored by the fact that Romanian is taught in schools, but its learning through school only, is believed to be difficult. Otherwise, bilingualism is rather developed when entering professional life and in adulthood, when the communication with different interlocutors than those from one's own teenage bubble is diverse. For Romanians in Sfântu Gheorghe bilingualism is associated with one's origin (for instance some Romanians from Moldova region speak the Hungarian dialect known as *csángó* in Hungarian and *ceangăiesc* in Romanian), while others also learn it once integrated in their professional life, due to the need to address their colleagues/ customers. Most frequently, Hungarian is understood by Romanians living in the city, without being spoken. Both ethnicities oftentimes avoid speaking the other's language, given the embarrassment of not using it correctly. The expectations for knowing one's own language still exists. When it comes to communication styles, the consultative and occasional ones are most frequently employed, whereas in closer relationships, the intimate one. As the language remains a vehicle of ethnicity, the frictions on its use have sometimes stirred discussions among Sfântu Gheorghe inhabitants, which are occasionally continued more offensively in the digital environment or even mediatized.

g) **Norms of interaction and interpretation:** Interactions are characterized by active listening and engagement in daily informal conversations. In situations that require formality, respondents do not consider that ethnicity dictates one's treatment. There are still however instances when Romanians

consider that Hungarians do not want to speak with them, which were confirmed by ethnic Hungarian respondents, when referring to some acquaintances. They pointed however that they believe that certain biases about Hungarians also persist among Romanians. The interethnic communication was also impacted by social cognition processes, which have institutionalized through historical memory and collective mind a certain reluctance towards the other, which has however softened due to daily non-conflictual interactions, which have been changing the "script".

h) **Genre**: The urban calendar impacts the discourse in intercultural communication. Most often the dominant discursive type is instructive, but between acquaintances the narrative and argumentative types are rather common.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The SPEAKING schema has allowed us to present a nuanced analysis of intercultural communication in one of the Romanian settlements where historically, ethnic tensions have lightened up more strongly its inhabitants, due to the ethnic make-up of Sfântu Gheorghe, social injustices on ethnic criteria dictated by certain evolutions in the post 18th century politics, but also due to the attachment towards the Hungarian identity of Szekler origins, with a distinct history and continuous desideratum for autonomy of certain groups. The latter still dominates public speech, while providing an incomplete and distorted image of intercultural relations in the area.

One of the limits of our research consists of the impossibility to generalize the results, as we preferred an in-depth exploration of the inquiry, which limited the study to the analysis of intercultural relations in Sfântu Gheorghe. The second limit is given by the fact that both authors are of Romanian ethnicity, but they have conducted the research from the position of cultural relativism. A third limit could result from the interpretativist nature of the research and by the fact that even if the first author collected the data during the periods dedicated to the fieldwork, some knowledge and observations were acquired during her childhood in Sfântu Gheorghe and subsequent visits of the city. Through our epistemological position we have acknowledged that the research is conditioned by the demarche of the researcher-interpreter, of observing reality and constructing meaning together with the informants and guided by the scientific body relevant for our field study.

The patterns of intercultural communication in Sfântu Gheorghe are characterized by the continuity of the interactions of the ethnicities in diverse contexts, the ethnic mélange bringing besides language barriers feelings of closeness to the other. Even if this closeness is not homogeneous, in Sfântu Gheorghe there is cohesion among the members of the local community, despite cultural differences, which are many times looking with criticism at external interventions which are seen as detrimental to the equilibrium formed among the inhabitants. We believe that this cohesion must not be seen as a form of attachment to the *Transylvanism* identity proposed by its adherents, being rather driven by inevitable acculturation processes, mutual respect and understanding, and a greater openness to cultural diversity. Ethnic Romanians – being a minority in Sfântu Gheorghe, adapted to the way of life surrounded by Hungarians, appreciating and practicing some of their customs, without renouncing to their own Romanian identity.

The feeling of closeness to the other is not experienced symmetrically by the participants to the intercultural communication, as the relations remain marked by a suspicions of the other's non-acceptance, which differs based on the level of socialization at an individual level, with the members of the other ethnic group. They vary among Sfântu Gheorghe inhabitants, from denying any remaining form of animosity, to its recognition and (more rarely) the refusal to interact with the other. While admitting the nuanced interactions we believe that the continuity of intercultural interactions for the city's active population – which happens in most situations without conflicts, has contributed to harmonious relations between Romanians and Hungarians, characterized by accepting the other, blurring the ethnic limits, understanding what is to be said or not when communicating, reaching an acceptable level of communication convergence, but also a delineation from certain extremist projects based on ethnic grounds.

The cohesion formed between local community members, is not experienced as well with the greater Romanian society, as ethnic Hungarians feel they are not entirely known, accepted and integrated which favors their non-participation to the public sphere. As the patterns of intercultural communication at the local level are predominantly efficient, the absence of their replication in relation with the greater Romanian society should represent a concern from a societal security perspective. Throughout our research, the

respondents referred to distorted representations of the relations by the "exterior" or "mass-media". As Lysaght (2009, 56) argued, the media could create a space for different groups to meet, but they can also emphasize cultural differences, creating a barrier in societal cohesion formation. We believe that further research should focus on the study of the media representations of these relations. Given the lack of frequent interactions, the media have the potential to shape the way in which they are understood and internalized, which is of great importance for societal security in Romania.

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MANIPULATION AND DISINFORMATION IN THE 2024 ROMANIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract: *The 2024 Romanian presidential elections marked the emergence of a new model of digital populism, driven not by ideology but by algorithmic virality, collective emotion, and participatory disinformation. This article analyzes the rapid rise of Călin Georgescu, an independent candidate who mobilized anger, fear, and resentment through a coordinated online campaign rooted in anti-system, anti-EU, and anti-Ukraine narratives. Drawing on theories of collective psychology, mimetic behavior, and affective publics, the study introduces the concept of mimetic voting in networked environments to explain how thousands of voters coalesced around a candidate most had not heard of two weeks before the election. By situating the Romanian case within the broader context of hybrid threats and post-truth populism in Eastern Europe, this paper reveals how social platforms no longer just disseminate political content — they construct political identity itself.*

Keywords*: digital media; disinformation; electoral manipulation; microtargeting; collective psychology*

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Romanian presidential elections marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of political communication in Eastern Europe. Călin Georgescu, previously unknown to most of the electorate, won the first round with over 2 million votes, largely due to a massive online campaign on platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. This unexpected success was not the result of traditional party mobilization, but rather the outcome of a sophisticated digital operation that echoed the disinformation strategies tested in Ukraine.

As in Ukraine, populism in Romania has emerged amid overlapping crises: economic instability, distrust in institutions, and geopolitical tensions related to the war in Ukraine. Disinformation narratives targeting the EU, NATO, and Ukrainian refugees became central to the political discourse. According to Expert Forum (2023), narratives such as "Russia offers cheap energy, but the EU refuses for ideological reasons" or "Brussels is to blame for inflation" were instrumental in creating a climate of Euroscepticism. These narratives—similar to those used in Ukraine post-2014—undermined support for pro-European parties and made space for candidates like Georgescu.

2. MECHANISMS OF DISINFORMATION

Georgescu's campaign relied heavily on social media virality. Over 25,000 TikTok accounts, many previously inactive, were activated in the two weeks before the elections. These accounts posted videos that echoed a coordinated narrative strategy. One of the most viral slogans—"Support for Ukraine is leading Romania to war"—garnered over 1.3 million views. As VIGINUM (2025) reports, these dynamics were not organic: they were the result of a sophisticated astroturfing operation that included influencer payments, Discord coordination groups, and algorithm manipulation.

Romanian disinformation narratives reflected the broader regional playbook. Fake news about Ukrainian refugees portrayed them as violent, privileged, or part of a Western colonization effort (CRC, 2025:14). These messages were already prevalent in Russian campaigns in Ukraine, Moldova, and even Poland. Their goal was clear: fracture solidarity, fuel resentment, and weaken support for Ukraine.

Platforms like TikTok played a central role. As shown in the "Romania Election Analysis" report, AUR—a far-right party with pro-Russian tendencies—accounted for 26% of all TikTok interactions while generating less than 9% of the content (CRC, 2025:10). This shows how the architecture of virality favors emotional, anti-system rhetoric. Georgescu's campaign exploited this mechanism by using influencers who never disclosed political sponsorships, creating the illusion of grassroots support.

3. DIGITAL NATIONALISM AND THE WAR NARRATIVE

Beyond anti-refugee narratives, Georgescu's messaging invoked a broader ideological frame: a platform-driven nationalism rooted in sovereignty, tradition, and resistance to globalism. TikTok videos often echoed slogans like "Romania must be neutral," "Let's stop this war," or "We are not NATO's puppets." This style of algorithmic nationalism closely mirrors what Ukrainian civil society faced before 2022: hybrid identities built online, where "neutrality" masked pro-Kremlin agendas. According to the *Romania Election Analysis*, this trend is best understood as a fusion of national grievance and algorithmic amplification: "The digital logic of identity politics merges with engagement farming, creating a new form of hybrid nationalism." (CRC, 2025:11). These narratives blurred the line between resistance and submission, reframing peace as capitulation to Russia's sphere of influence.

4. PROXIES, INFLUENCE, AND COORDINATION

The most striking similarity between Romania and Ukraine lies in the use of domestic proxies to advance foreign narratives. Just as pro-Russian actors in Ukraine used clergy, local oligarchs, and media channels, in Romania, platforms like "Daily Romania" and personalities like Georgescu served to mainstream pro-Kremlin content. AUR and associated influencers functioned as "anti-Western in substance, though nationalist in form" (CRC, 2025:9).

The broader campaign ecosystem included 18 interconnected websites promoting coordinated articles, Facebook ads, and conspiratorial videos. According to Šierka & Stănoiu (2024), over $381,000 was funneled toward digital promotion in just a few weeks—money not declared in Georgescu's official campaign reports. This raises serious questions about the transparency of electoral financing and the regulation of political communication online.

5. PSYCHOLOGY AND POLARIZATION

Cass Sunstein (2007) argues that in contexts of uncertainty and instability, individuals become increasingly vulnerable to simple, emotionally charged narratives. The 2024 Romanian presidential election occurred precisely in such a context—marked by inflation, an energy crisis, deep distrust in institutions, and the psychological reverberations of the war in Ukraine. Yet what made Georgescu's campaign uniquely effective was not only the exploitation of technological affordances, but his strategic engagement with collective emotions, particularly anger.

6. ANGER AS A POLITICAL EMOTION

Anger, as political theorist Martha Nussbaum argues in *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016), becomes explosive when it arises from perceived humiliation, exclusion, or systemic injustice. According to Nussbaum, anger appears to serve three significant functions. First, it acts as a vital signal through which the oppressed become aware of the wrongs committed against them. It also serves as a crucial source of motivation, driving them to protest, to resist injustice, and to make their grievances known to the broader world. Finally, anger often seems simply justified: indignation in the face of grave injustice is appropriate, and in that sense, anger expresses a moral truth (Nussbaum, 2016:211). In contemporary politics, such anger is often not aimed at specific policies, but at symbolic enemies: elites, outsiders, abstract institutions.

Antonio Momoc (2025) shows that Călin Georgescu's rise was not driven by traditional grassroots mobilization or mainstream media visibility, but by a "below-the-radar" digital campaign, strategically segmented and algorithmically amplified, particularly on TikTok. His campaign was artificially boosted through networks of bots and fake accounts, while local influencers circulated pro-Georgescu messages without fully grasping his ideological affiliations. This strategy drew users into affective modes of participation that not only helped content go viral but also deepened their own radicalization. As Momoc notes, the campaign functioned as a digital revolt against elites, mobilized through emotion rather than deliberation.

The loss of trust in political elites, parliamentary parties, and the President of the state, as well as in the Romanian mass media, is the result of growing disillusionment and distrust among the popular classes, the socially marginalized, and the broader public affected by the economic crisis—people determined to take revenge against the political establishment, the leaders of major parliamentary parties, and also against the media elites, perceived as politicized and involved in corruption scandals. (Momoc, 2025:94).

In Romania's 2024 presidential election, this anger was omnidirectional but strategically reframed. It targeted political elites but was projected onto "Brussels," "NATO," "the West," "Ukrainian refugees," and "Soros." Călin Georgescu did not seek to pacify this sentiment. He channeled and weaponized it, transforming dispersed emotional frustration into a cohesive identity: the angry Romanian patriot, betrayed by globalism, awakening against the system.

George Lakoff argues that political emotions such as anger are never isolated or purely instinctive—they are activated, shaped, and sustained by deeper cognitive frames that organize how individuals interpret the world. Within this framework, anger functions not merely as a spontaneous reaction, but as a structured response embedded in narratives that determine who is virtuous, who is culpable, and what kind of moral action is warranted. As Lakoff notes, "Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world… they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act" (Lakoff, 2004:XV). These frames reconfigure facts into emotionally charged moral dichotomies: austerity becomes betrayal; NATO becomes occupation; Ukraine's suffering becomes Romania's burden. In the case of Georgescu's campaign, such reframings were crucial—they reduced geopolitical complexity to affective clarity, transforming confusion and frustration into targeted moral outrage.

In her analysis of populist movements, Ruth Wodak notes that "emotions like fear and anger are not epiphenomena but central features of political strategy" (Wodak, 2015:21). Georgescu's campaign, much like Trump's or Bolsonaro's, did not arise from rational deliberation over policy platforms but from emotional mobilization: a visceral response to perceived loss — of status, of sovereignty, of identity.

The narrative "Support for Ukraine is leading Romania to war" was powerful not because of geopolitical accuracy, but because it offered emotional relief. It redirected fear into certainty,

confusion into blame. As Sara Ahmed claims in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), that emotions work to align individuals with communities, and that is why, anger, in our case, becomes a means of belonging.

Moreover, Nussbaum warns us that anger often demands retribution rather than repair. The emotional grammar of Georgescu's supporters was not "let's fix Romania" but "let's punish those who ruined it." His slogans, imagery, and TikTok campaigns consistently used us/them dichotomies, reinforcing tribal resentment and moral superiority.

This dynamic was amplified by algorithmic feedback loops, which ensured that users who engaged with angry or fearful content were systematically exposed to more of the same. Political psychologist Karen Stenner, in *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (2005), argues that individuals with a predisposition toward authoritarianism become significantly more intolerant when confronted with what she terms "normative threats" — situations in which social consensus breaks down, group values seem contested, or political leaders are perceived as weak. These threats, often framed in terms of identity and belonging, trigger an affective shift: anger and fear become catalysts for a yearning toward order, obedience, and uniformity. Georgescu's messaging exploited precisely this psychological mechanism — transforming digital frustration into moral certainty and authoritarian receptiveness (Stenner, 2005:32).

In short, Georgescu's rise must be understood not as a rational electoral phenomenon, but as an emotional alignment: a collective act of catharsis masquerading as a political campaign. Anger was not the byproduct of disinformation — it was the fuel, the architecture, and the connective tissue of an alternative political community forged in TikTok loops and Telegram channels.

7. FROM INDIVIDUALS TO CROWDS: THE GROUP MIND

To understand how this anger scaled from individual sentiment to electoral force, we must return to classic theories of collective psychology. Gustave Le Bon, in *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895), argued that individuals in crowds exhibit behaviors and beliefs they would never adopt in isolation. Social media platforms are today's digital crowds—environments where individual cognition is suppressed in favor of mimetic behavior, tribal alignment, and emotional contagion. Georgescu's supporters did not vote as

isolated individuals, but as part of affective communities—groups organized not by ideology, but by shared ressentiment. As Craig Calhoun (2004) observed in his work on nationalism, collective identity is often activated in moments of crisis through narratives of injustice and humiliation. TikTok and Telegram groups functioned as affinity spaces, where emotional narratives were rehearsed and reinforced until they became political truths.

8. GROUP DYNAMICS AND BELIEF REINFORCEMENT

Călin Georgescu's campaign cannot be understood merely through the lens of individual persuasion. Its strength lay in its ability to activate and organize collective emotions, transforming isolated frustrations into a coherent group identity. This transformation occurred not in town squares or televised debates, but inside digital ecosystems — personalized, emotional, and self-reinforcing.

As Eli Pariser (2011) explains in *The Filter Bubble*, digital platforms curate reality according to past behavior. Once a user engages with a nationalist or conspiratorial video — "Romania must be neutral," "We are being dragged into NATO's war" — the algorithm offers more of the same, effectively sealing the user inside a self-reinforcing emotional universe. These bubbles create not just epistemic insulation, but identity enclaves.

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) describes how repetition triggers cognitive familiarity, which in turn breeds perceived truth. When users see the same slogan — "Support for Ukraine is leading Romania to war" — dozens of times, shared across different influencer accounts, their brain registers it not as manipulation, but as common sense. This is especially effective in short-form, high-frequency environments like TikTok, where cognitive overload is bypassed in favor of emotional immediacy.

Yet the most important transformation is social, not cognitive. Platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Telegram do not simply isolate users — they connect them into communities of affect. These are not structured around debate, but around mimicry, affirmation, and symbolic performance. Craig Calhoun (2002) argues that collective identity is not merely inherited, but actively constituted through public participation, particularly in response to perceived threats or crises. In such moments, shared narratives of injustice and public discourse serve as the foundation for solidarity and the imagining of common belonging. In these environments, belief is performative. Sharing a meme, remixing a TikTok, or commenting "Down with NATO" is less about conveying information and more about displaying allegiance. Support for Georgescu became a social marker — not just a political preference, but a signal that one was "awakened," "against the system," "on the right side of history." This process aligns with what Sunstein (2001:67) calls "group polarization": when like-minded people interact, their views become more extreme. In Georgescu's networks, this led to an amplification of distrust, radicalization of rhetoric, and increased intolerance toward dissenting opinions. TikTok's duet and remix functions created feedback loops of ideological escalation, where fringe ideas became normalized through repetition and group validation.

In *The Misinformation Age*, O'Connor and Weatherall (2019) argue that individuals often adopt beliefs not based on personal conviction, but by inferring credibility from the actions of others. This mechanism, known as an information cascade, occurs when people set aside their own knowledge in favor of what appears to be socially validated truth. In digital environments, where engagement metrics serve as cues of credibility, such cascades are rapidly amplified — a handful of viral posts can quickly generate the illusion of consensus and produce what appears to be a shared truth (p. 30). When individuals see others acting on a belief — for example, voting for Georgescu, endorsing conspiracy theories, or attacking mainstream media — they often follow not because they are convinced, but because they assume others must know something. In digital networks, this logic accelerates. What starts as a few viral posts becomes, very quickly, a shared truth.

Even more insidiously, conformity pressure begins to operate. People within these digital micro-communities begin to suppress doubts in order to avoid social exclusion. The more tightly knit the group, the stronger the incentive to align with the dominant narrative. In these spaces, even rational, skeptical individuals may end up adopting and defending false beliefs, simply to maintain belonging. This mechanism was at the heart of Georgescu's digital strategy. His campaign did not rely on argumentation or debate. It created an environment where belief became identity, and where truth was less important than solidarity.

9. FROM PASSIVE AUDIENCES TO PARTICIPATORY BELIEVERS

The success of Călin Georgescu's campaign was not simply due to the spread of disinformation, but its performance — and the way users were invited to co-create that performance. Unlike traditional media, where audiences consume content passively, platforms like TikTok and Telegram enable participatory disinformation ecosystems. In these environments, users don't just receive messages — they respond, remix, amplify, and embody them. Georgescu's digital strategy leveraged this participatory structure masterfully. TikTok duets, Telegram polls, meme challenges, and hashtag cascades allowed supporters to play an active role in the campaign's narrative. This was o't a one-way broadcast; it was an interactive ritual, where citizens were encouraged to become producers of ideology, not merely consumers.

Zizi Papacharissi (2015) argues that political expression in digital spaces is increasingly driven by affective circulation rather than rational deliberation. Platforms like Twitter invite affective gestures — short, emotionally infused acts of communication — that blend opinion, identity performance, and social connection. As she explains, users often share content not to persuade or inform, but "as self-referential attempts to connect the private to the public and the personal to the civic" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 116). This performative logic of participation signals belonging, not belief — a way of affiliating with a cause or community rather than endorsing the truth of a claim.

Posting "Stop the war," resharing a Georgescu TikTok, or joining a Telegram thread wasn't just an act of communication — it was a declaration of identity. Supporting Georgescu thus became a form of digital belonging. His slogans — "Romania must wake up," "Down with the system," "We want peace, not NATO's war" — were less about policy and more about moral alignment. These became identity markers for users who felt excluded from traditional politics but empowered in digital communities.

José van Dijck (2013) shows that identity formation in the digital age is increasingly co-produced by humans and machines, as platforms shape not only how individuals interact, but also how they perform and perceive themselves. Through algorithms, protocols, and engagement metrics, social media infrastructures do not merely facilitate civic expression — they actively structure it. This process, which van Dijck does not name explicitly but can be described as the platformization of civic identity, transforms participation into a calculable and performative act, where visibility and influence are mediated by technical defaults rather than democratic parity. As she notes, platforms subtly reconfigure "what it means to be connected, to be social, and to be a citizen" in a culture where connectivity often overrides connectedness (van Dijck, 2013:32–34).

TikTok's design — built on virality, remixability, and short-form intensity — turned political ideas into aesthetic content. Users did not just endorse Georgescu; they danced to his message, lip-synced his soundbites, and wove his rhetoric into lifestyle posts.

This participatory turn is crucial for understanding the depth of commitment among Georgescu's base. Tucker et al. (2018) consider that polarization in digital spaces is not merely a byproduct of misinformation, but frequently its intended outcome. In their analysis, political actors and interest groups deliberately exploit the architecture of social media to spread divisive content, not simply to deceive, but to deepen affective divides and harden group identities. As users engage with emotionally charged narratives — through likes, shares, and comments — their beliefs become more entrenched, and the space for deliberation narrows. Rather than correcting misinformation, such engagement often amplifies it, reinforcing the partisan logics that make democratic dialogue increasingly difficult

Georgescu's campaign, by encouraging participation rather than persuasion, built a collective subjectivity that was not only angry, but proudly oppositional: against institutions, against "mainstream media," against Ukraine, against the West. As Shoshana Zuboff (2019) argues in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, platforms are not passive conduits of information—they are engineered systems designed to extract and manipulate emotional data. The more reactive and expressive users are, the more valuable they become within these systems. Participation is not neutral; it trains the algorithm to better anticipate and exploit emotional vulnerability. Georgescu's campaign was finely attuned to this logic. It did not just spread through the algorithm—it worked to intensify it, encouraging users to engage emotionally, which in turn reinforced their own radicalization. "The goal is not only to know but to shape. The systems are engineered to activate, manipulate, and direct human behavior in real time." (Zuboff, 2019:327). Georgescu's campaign did not merely ride the algorithm; it activated users to train it, reinforcing their own radicalization through engagement.

Ultimately, this participatory model created a feedback loop of identity and ideology. TikTok users didn't just learn what to believe — they learned who they were through what they shared. Supporting Georgescu became a mode of self-performance, and the campaign transformed into a community of emotional resonance, not just a political movement.

10. CONCLUSION OF THE SUBCHAPTER

Călin Georgescu's electoral ascent cannot be understood through the traditional lens of individual persuasion or ideological alignment. His rise must be read as a case of digitally mediated collective psychology, in which anger, emotional contagion, and algorithmic structure converged to forge a powerful, oppositional identity.

This was not an electorate shaped by policy debate or rational deliberation, but a participatory public animated by shared resentment and moral certainty. What Georgescu offered was not just a platform — but a role to perform, a narrative to inhabit, and a community to join. In this digital landscape, truth was less important than resonance, and engagement was not about being informed, but about being seen and belonging.

The online crowd did not deliberate — it reacted, remixed, and reaffirmed. It behaved as a collective mind, not because its members were irrational, but because their emotional needs were met more fully through participation than through persuasion.

In 2024, Georgescu didn't just supply illusions — he invited people to co-author them.

11. FINAL REFLECTION: MIMETIC VOTING AND THE NETWORKERD BIRTH OF A CANDIDATE

Călin Georgescu's electoral surge must be understood not only as the result of a sophisticated disinformation campaign, but as the emergence of a new logic of political formation in the digital age. He was not simply "chosen" by voters — he was assembled through affect, performed into visibility, and validated through emotional resonance. His candidacy is best explained by what I propose to call the theory of mimetic voting in networked environments.

This model departs from classical theories of rational electoral behavior or ideological alignment. Instead, it posits that in highly polarized, high-speed digital ecosystems, voting decisions can emerge not from deliberation, but from affective convergence — a process shaped by collective emotions, rapid exposure, and the mimetic behavior of social groups.

Three mechanisms define this model:

1. Accelerated Credibility Through Emotional Repetition. Georgescu's image saturated TikTok and Telegram within a matter of days. As Daniel Kahneman (2011) notes, repeated exposure produces familiarity, and familiarity breeds perceived truth. In the absence of prior knowledge, visibility becomes credibility. People didn't know him — but they saw him, constantly.

2. Social Validation via Affective Belonging. Voters did not simply support Georgescu — they joined a movement, a digital tribe. Echoing theories by Eli Pariser (2011) and Sunstein (2017), information was not weighed individually, but accepted through group dynamics. Liking a Georgescu video or sharing a meme became a performative act of allegiance, a way to declare: "I belong to those who fight the system."

3. Anger as Identity and Engine. Following Martha Nussbaum (2016) and George Lakoff (2004), anger was not incidental — it was the campaign's operating system. Georgescu didn't propose policies — he gave voters an enemy. He turned their rage into a narrative of virtue. Each repost, each remix, each hashtag was a personal contribution to a perceived collective struggle.

In this logic, TikTok was not just a platform for dissemination — it was a stage for political identity formation. Georgescu emerged as a function of a crowd that didn't necessarily agree on a program, but recognized itself in shared resentment. He became the face of a digital multitude that defined itself not by what it believed in, but by what it rejected — elites, institutions, the West, Ukraine, complexity itself.

As Gustave Le Bon warned in 1895: "The masses never thirsted after truth. They demand illusions, and whoever gives them illusions becomes their master." Georgescu did not just give them illusions — he let them co-create them.

In sum, the 2024 election revealed a new paradigm: the networked birth of political candidates, assembled not by party machines but by algorithmic virality, emotional mimicry, and shared anger. The implications go far beyond Romania. In a media ecosystem designed for performance over persuasion, the next candidate may not need a platform — only a hashtag.

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LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES IN EU PARLIAMENTARY DISCOURSE ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract: *Recent conflicts such as the war in Ukraine and the war between Israel and Hamas have focused attention on the role of the European Union as a global actor in international politics. While critics of the EU's role point to its lack of military capabilities, other scholars argue for an expanded understanding of the EU's role in international security, taking into account the non-military means at its disposal. This paper analyzes how discursive strategies of legitimation are employed by members of the EU Parliament during debates on issues related to international security. The analysis focuses on the debate held in the European Parliament in April 2024 regarding the adoption of measures following Iran's attack on Israel. Drawing on the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Van Leeuwen, 2008; Fairclough, 2003), the study examines the speakers' use of discursive evaluation and legitimation in conjunction with modal markers in order to maintain their stance.*

Keywords: *discourse studies; legitimation strategies; European Union; international security*

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the European Union as a global actor has been examined in recent research on EU integration and development, revealing a diversity of opinions. Critics point out the lack of coordination not only between the member states, but also between the multiple layers of decision and the effect of overlapping institutional roles (e.g. Kirchner, 2006). Besides problems of institutional coherence, the EU also suffers due to "the absence of satisfactory mechanisms for dealing with disputes" not only between the European Council and the Commission, but also within the Commission (Bretherton & Vogel, 2013:383). Another weakness of the EU has been identified in the lack of military capacity, leading to the conclusion that it will become a truly credible international actor when and if it acquires political and military means as well besides the economic and diplomatic ones that she already possesses (Larsen, 2002:285). In other words, the EU has been considered to be a "civilian power", instead of a military one (Larsen, 2002:289).

More nuanced perspectives argue that the EU should not be treated as a single state, but as a specific international actor, a transnational entity or an international organization (e.g. Tonra, 2006). In order to better understand and account for the uniqueness of the EU, different concepts about security need to be applied. According to Kirchner (2006), EU security should not be viewed in terms of a community, but instead as governance. From this perspective, threats are understood as both military and non-military and response to threats can also be given in form of "conflict prevention measures and post-conflict peace-building efforts" (Kirchner, 2006:952). Moreover, the application of the concept of security governance needs to take into account the ideational dimension of the relations between international actors, paying attention to EU's attempts to build local and regional trust (Zwolski, 2014:947). The concept of security itself should not focus on militaristic elements exclusively, but instead encompass the social, economic, political and cultural dimensions as well, and "place humans rather than states at the conceptual core" (Lahiry, 2020:186). A growing interest in humanitarian and moral values is also visible in the discourses on EU legitimation, which have shifted from a functionalist understanding of Europe's role to the narrative of the European identity and later to the narrative of a democratic Europe (Biegoń, 2013).

Taking into account previous research on legitimation strategies and international security discourse, this paper investigates how current security issues are discussed in EU institutions,

focusing on a debate held in the European Parliament regarding the Israel – Hamas war and Iran's attack on Israel on 13 April 2024. The aim is to analyze which discursive strategies are employed by the politicians in order to legitimate the measures proposed and whether and how the existence of a common foreign policy is asserted or challenged at the discursive level.

2. DISCURSIVE LEGITIMATION AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Starting from the observation that „Politics and language are closely intertwined" (Van Der Valk, 2003:314), it is not surprising that research in international politics has shown a growing interest in the field of discourse analysis, examining specific discursive features in order to gain a better insight into the processes of meaning making in politics. Some studies analyze speech acts, such as blaming (e.g. Verbeek, 2024) or shaming (e.g. Every, 2013), while others focus on the use of deixis (e.g. Suleiman *et al.*, 2002) or narrative structures (e.g. Homolar, 2022) in political discourse. The area of discursive legitimation also proves to be a useful tool for the analysis of the (inter)national political sphere.

The importance of the research on legitimation for the field of discourse analysis has been brought into attention by Van Leeuwen's influential work *Discourse and Practice* (2008), within the field of critical discourse studies. According to this perspective, texts are representations of social practices on which they draw on and which they transform (Van Leeuwen, 2008:5). Moreover, texts do not only represent what already exists, but they also evaluate, justify it or set goals for future actions (Van Leeuwen, 2008:6). The discourse about social practices also includes different ways of legitimating them. Van Leeuwen (2008:105-106) identifies four categories of legitimation: authorization, based on the authority of traditions, laws, or institutional roles, moral evaluation, based on value systems, rationalization, through appeals to reason, and mythopoesis, through narratives that enforce the legitimate ways of acting. The categories advanced by van Leeuwen are expanded by Reyes (2011), who identifies five major legitimization strategies in political discourse. The first category is legitimization through emotions, which includes discursive constructions of in- and out-groups. The next categories are: the construction of a hypothetical future, the appeal to rationality, the inclusion of expert voices, and the use of altruistic reasons for action (Reyes, 2011:785-787). Further studies attempt to apply the categories of

legitimation strategies, by studying different discursive genres. For example, Van Der Valk (2003) analyzes legitimation together with argumentation and the use of rhetorical figures in parliamentary discourse. Other studies investigate the use of legitimization from a temporal perspective, focusing on the changes produced in the legitimization of the European Communities over an extended period of time (Biegoń, 2013) or on the strategies employed in order to legitimate ongoing policy processes (Brusenbauch Meislová, 2023).

Researching legitimation proves to be fruitful for the study of international relations as this perspective allows the researcher to go beyond mere rhetorical analysis and delve deeper into the construction of power relations in discourse. A recent turn in security studies acknowledges the importance of discourse for the construction of threat. According to this point of view, treats do not exist by themselves, but are constituted through language (e.g. Homolar, 2022; Hama, 2017). More precisely, the selection of words influences what people think and feel about a security issue (Homolar, 2022:328). In a previous work, the concept of securitization is explained as what "specific groups or particular state elites" define as a security problem (Kirchner, 2006:949). Just as threats are discursively constituted, the concept of security and the solutions to security threats need to be constructed and legitimated in discourse in order to be embraced by the audience. However, legitimacy moves beyond the area of discourse and becomes a pervasive tool in the political field, which leads to its definition as "a key resource toward facilitating public compliance, obtaining and sustaining power, achieving social acceptance, increasing trust, and gaining popularity" (Brusenbauch Meislová, 2023:816). A synthesis of the functions of legitimation is provided by Biegoń (2013:196), who considers that legitimation strategies aim to generate support for a particular cause. Such strategies are employed in EU discourse, in connection with the set of European moral values of freedom, democracy and attention to human rights (Kirchner, 2006:956), reinforcing the image of Europe as a cultural and value-based community (Biegoń, 2013:204). The attempt to generate support for a cause or to persuade the audience in regard to a certain stance is particularly important in the case of debates involving representatives of different parties or states, as it happens in the European Parliament. The following analysis examines the ways in which speakers employ legitimation strategies in order to

background or highlight different aspects of real situations and thus obtain support for their cause.

3. METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

The methodological framework draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially on Van Leeuwen's (2008) categories of legitimation strategies presented above. The identification of legitimation in discourse is correlated with Fairclough's work (2003) regarding textual analysis. Fairclough (2003) links categories of modality to exchange types and distinguishes between what he calls 'knowledge exchanges', associated with epistemic modality, and 'activity exchanges', associated with deontic modality. Knowledge exchanges involve statements and questions. Statements can be made in form of assertions, modalized statements, and denials, while questions can be either modalized or non-modalized (Fairclough, 2003:167). Activity exchanges include demands and offers. Demands can take the form of prescriptions, modalized statements, or proscription, while offers can be represented through acts of undertaking an act, refusal to act, or modalized statements that express a low commitment to act (Fairclough, 2003:168). Modality can be used in order to claim and assert the speaker's power as an individual or as the representative of a group. In this manner, power in discourse is ultimately linked to discursive self-identification (Fairclough, 2003:172-173).

The corpus is formed by the speeches delivered in the European Parliament in the meeting held on 24 April 2024, when the topic discussed regarded the recent missile attack carried by Iran on Israel and the stance to be taken by the EU. The European Parliament is an important forum for the study of international politics, "a possible transnational space", where the members represent both national interest and supranational perspectives (Krotký, 2023:49). The debate was held with the participation of Josep Borrell Fontelles, Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP). According to the information available on the official website (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/), the HR/VP has the responsibility of promoting institutional coherence, building consensus between EU members, coordinating EU's external action, representing the EU's position in international negotiations and so forth. However, this complex role does not avoid challenges and "intermittent turf wars between the HR/VP, the Commission President and the President of the Council have remained a feature of

the new policy environment" (Bretherton, Vogel, 2013:384). While the topic debated in the corpus did not directly involve the EU member states, the speeches held by the Members of the Parliament showed that international security had become increasingly a matter of concern for the EU and that some MEPs did not agree with the VP's stance on the issues discussed.

The speeches included in the corpus totalized 22 970 words and were retrieved from the website of the European Parliament (https://www.europarl. europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2024-04-24-ITM-003_EN.html). All the texts were freely available at the time of the research. The corpus is multilingual and comprises speeches held in English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian. The speeches available in other languages than English have been first translated into English by the author, then the translation was verified with Google Translate (Krotký, 2023). For reasons of space, the excerpts presented below will be given in English and the original text will be quoted only in order to highlight particular linguistic features for analysis.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Two main options emerged during the debate. The HR/VP advocated a diplomatic approach, arguing for dialogue with all parties to the conflict, including the Iranian leadership. On the other hand, several politicians opted for a more categorical stance, arguing for the need to impose sanctions on Iran. The debate on the measures to be taken in response to Iran's behavior falls into the category of "peace-enforcement efforts" undertaken by the EU as an international actor with the aim of reducing a conflict or preventing its escalation (Kirchner, 2006:952).

4.1 Legitimation of the diplomatic approach. The diplomatic approach was advocated by the Vice-President of the Commission, Josep Borrell Fontelles, whose intervention opened the meeting. In his speech, Mr. Borrell presented the actions taken by the Commission with regard to the Middle East crisis, presented the solution considered to be the best, and presented the arguments in favor of this solution.

The Vice-President began his speech by announcing the topic ("…we are here to discuss the Iranians' attack on Israel and the need for de-escalation, and our response to these events."). This statement already indicates that the speaker wants to reach a consensus with the audience by using the first-person plural pronoun "we" and the possessive

adjective "our". The noun "need" indicates a deontic modality, implying that the situation requires that a certain course of action be pursued.

The speaker then describes the state of affairs, presenting facts already known to the public. Interestingly, Borrell uses repetition, insisting on the extraordinary nature of Iran's attack on Israel. He says the same thing three times, using different terms: "On 13 April, Iran's attack against Israel was unprecedented. It never happened before. It is the first time that Iran directly attacked Israel from its territory (…)". The statements are made in the form of positive statements - assertions, with a high commitment to truth on behalf of the speaker, and at the same time the speaker avoids the use of moral judgments or evaluations of Iran's actions. The only terms that may carry an embedded negative value are the noun "attack" and the verb "to attack". Immediately after this presentation, Josep Borrell mentions another act that happened earlier, regarding Israel's actions: "All this without forgetting the Israeli attack that preceded it, and we also condemned that when it happened". By adding this statement, the speaker constructs his identity as an objective politician who avoids explicit alignment with one of the parties to the conflict.

The next section of the speech contains more evaluative terms than the previous part, but these terms ("tense", "dangerous", "escalation") regard the events instead of the actors involved. The evaluation is intertwined with intensification:

> This aerial attack represents a major escalation of an already very tense situation in the region, where we have witnessed dangerous games of attacks and retaliations, retaliations and attacks.

The intensifiers are the adjective "major" with a superlative meaning and the superlative "very tense", which conveys the idea of danger. Furthermore, the description of the situation is summarized by a repetition, more precisely an antimetabole, with the order of the terms reversed: "games of attacks and retaliations, retaliations and attacks". In this way, the speaker intensifies his presentation and implies that the events have entered a spiral of violence that is difficult to end. The use of the nouns "attacks" and "retaliations" instead of the corresponding verbs removes the agents from this statement. Thus, the speaker avoids any explicit accusation or criticism of the states involved in the conflict.

Borrell tries to keep his general tone moderate and objective, and an intensely negative assessment of the general situation is introduced through reported speech, first in English, then in Spanish:

> And I want to use the same words that United Nations Secretary-General Guterres used at the Security Council. He said, the region 'is at the edge of an abyss'. Estamos al borde de un abismo, dijo el Secretario General. No son palabras huecas.

The importance of the evaluation is underlined through the repetition in Spanish language, followed by the speaker's own evaluation of the quote ("No son palabras huecas." [These are not empty words]). The use of reported speech indicates an attempt to lower the speaker's commitment to the utterance (Fairclough, 2003:171). The speaker's moderation is also evident later in the use of the Spanish verb "parecer" when describing the current situation: "Ahora, últimamente, parece que nos hemos movido un poco desde el borde del abismo (…)" [Now, lately, it seems we have moved a little back from the edge of the abyss (…)]. The verb functions as a marker of modalization, indicating a low degree of certainty. A similar modalization appears later in Borrell's discourse, through the use of the English verb "might", also indicating a low level of certainty: "The spiral of attacks on counterattacks might have slowed down (…) but the situation remains unstable and dangerous".

In addition to describing the situation in the Middle East, Josep Borrell presents the actions taken so far by the European Union and its positioning as a collective political actor on the international stage. The actions are presented in a series of statements beginning with the pronoun "we", while the last one also includes the indefinite pronoun "all", emphasizing the common stance. Here, Borrell signals that he is speaking on behalf of the entire Union, building a general consensus between the EU as an institution and its member states:

> We the European Union, together with Member states, we have taken a strong stance asking all actors in the region to move away from this abyss (…). We discussed it at the foreign ministers level on Monday. We all clearly condemn the Iranian attack and confirm our commitment to the security of Israel.

Here we can see that all the actions attributed to the community of European states refer to the level of discourse. The verbs used refer to speech acts ("to ask", "to discuss", "to condemn", "to confirm") and not to concrete actions taken. Next, the actions supported by the speaker are presented, again in a series of statements in which agency is deleted:

> There is a political consensus to suspend the existing sanctions against Iran. The foreign affairs ministers in June were meeting together with the defence ministers. It took a political agreement that will be implemented in the next days.

Here, the speaker does not explicitly mention who agreed to suspend the sanctions. The agency is only implied because the next utterance mentions two categories of agents involved: "foreign ministers" and "defense ministers". Through the appeal to background knowledge, the audience can infer that Borrell is referring to the ministers of the EU member states. However, the action directly attributed to these persons is represented by the verb "to meet" ("were meeting together"). The first and last utterances in this excerpt contain no direct reference to the agents involved. In the first utterance the agency is obscured by the noun "consensus" in the subject position, while in the last utterance it is obscured by the use of a verb in the passive voice ("will be implemented") without directly stating who will implement the agreed upon measure. All the utterances in this excerpt are made in the form of assertions and are not modalized, suggesting that the speaker is committed to their truth value.

Josep Borrell uses modalization later in his speech when he tries to present arguments to support his position. He believes that the sanctions adopted against Iran have been ineffective, and this idea is introduced in modalized statements that begin with "I think":

> However, I think that we have to understand that sanctions alone cannot deter Iran. This should be evident after years and years of international sanctions. Iran is, together with North Korea, the most sanctioned country in the world. (…) I think this is a moment for diplomacy, to deploy maximum diplomatic efforts, to act to calm down the situation (…).

He uses intensifiers such as the superlative "the most sanctioned" and the repetition "years and years" to emphasize the futility of the sanctions policy. Borrell's viewpoint is an appeal to diplomacy. In an attempt to soften this idea, the speaker presents it as a subjective statement by using the first person singular pronoun "I".

The use of subjective modalization implies that the speaker does not dare to impose his opinion on the audience. The legitimation strategy in use in this excerpt is that of instrumental rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2008:113), with the speaker focusing on the best means to achieve a desired outcome.

In the last part of his intervention, the VP employs a different legitimation strategy, through the appeal to moral values (Van Leeuwen, 2008:110-111). The terms used at the end of the speech are loaded with positive values when talking about the purposes of the EU:

> So we have to be able to build peace and stability in the region (…), also taking into account the high human cost of the conflicts which are raging there. The European voice has to be the voice of reason – trying to decrease the many humanitarian sufferings and look for a stable peace (…).

These statements function as a conclusion to the entire speech and are modalized by the use of the verb "must", indicating that the external circumstances lead to only one possible solution, that of making peace. In this excerpt, the terms "peace" and "stability" are contrasted with "conflict". The negative effects of the conflicts are presented through references to the victims: "high human cost", "much humanitarian suffering". Both references are in the form of noun phrases with a quantitative determiner ("high", "many"). Furthermore, the conflicts are presented as "raging", a verb that also reinforces the idea of violence. The choice of lexical items in this fragment emphasizes the idea of a humanitarian tragedy and urges the audience to accept the proposed solution. It is important to note that the speaker frames his position in terms of moral values and does not comment on other economic or political reasons. Throughout his opening speech, the VP tries to construct his identity as an objective diplomat who really cares about European values. He prefers to background the authority of his official position and instead use appeals to reason and then to moral values.

4.2 Legitimation of the sanctions approach. The debate revealed a diversity of opinion in the European Parliament, with many MEPs rejecting the solution proposed by the Vice-President and calling instead for a more forceful response from the European Union. The main demands formulated by these MEPs concerned the adoption of sanctions against Iran and the designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the armed force defending the Iranian regime, as a terrorist organization.

The strategy often employed in order to legitimate this stance was moral evaluation (Van

Leeuwen, 2008:109-110) which was sometimes intertwined with the appeal to emotions (Reyes, 2011:785-786) through the marked opposition between an in-group and an out-group. Sometimes the opposition was even expressed in military terms, suggesting that the differences are irreconcilable. For example, R. Juknevičienė (PPE Group) stated that:

> (…) those who fail to defeat the terrorist Russia, Iran, North Korea and others, even though they had every chance. I still believe that we, the European Union, together with our allies, we can – that our leaders can go down in history as the ones who managed to overcome bloody regimes.

Here, the inclusive pronoun "we" constructs a community of opinions and policies and clearly identifies the in-group formed by the EU and its allies. The out-group is formed not only by Iran, but also by the states that do not respect democracy and humanitarian principles, represented here by a generic categorization ("bloody regimes") loaded with negative values. The conflict frame is reinforced by the use of the verbs "to defeat" and "to overcome", which indicate that a negotiation-based approach is rejected and that the two groups are engaged in a struggle.

The war frame was also used by other politicians who presented Iran as a direct threat not only to the Middle East but also to the whole of Europe. H. Neumann (Verts/ALE Group) used the possessive adjective "our" when talking about Iran's attack, thus including the in-group in the conflict:

> The drones and missiles attacking Israel and our ships in the Red Sea are manufactured in Iran, and we should have sanctioned all those involved in that months ago.

The first part of the utterance is an assertion, with a high degree of certainty, which serves to legitimate the second part, which advocates the introduction of further sanctions.

The term "our" is repeated in the speech of another MEP, L. Mandl (PPE), who emphasizes the idea of immediate danger: "The Iranian regime is also threatening us via financing terrorism and Islamism on our continent, in our cities, in our rural areas". In this excerpt, the use of a verb in the present tense and the enumeration of nouns denoting places suggest that the threat is occurring at the moment of speech and is approaching the speaker. This example illustrates the theory of spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization (Cap, 2013) that is visible in counterterrorism discourse.

The negative actions attributed to the out-group (Reyes, 2011: 785) are often presented through intensification in order to trigger the audience's emotions. Several speakers pointed to the blatant violation of democratic principles in Iran. M. Schirdewan (Fraktion The Left) focused on the actions of the regime, through the use of a series of noun phrases: "Arbitrary arrests, the execution of prisoners, violence against protesting women happen everyday", where the negative meaning of the nouns is placed in contrast with the final term "everyday" (Germ. "Alltag" in the original version), which reinforces the idea of a constant threat. In the following example, the victims of the conflicts in the Middle East are presented through an enumeration in which the speaker selects the most vulnerable categories ("babies", "hostages") in addition to the term "families", which contributes to the emotional involvement of the audience: "babies being born orphans after airstrikes; families living in horror whilst seeking refuge from bombs night after night; tormented hostages unable to hear the voices of their loved ones; and so much more" (H. Neumann, Verts/ALE Group). These attitudes fall into the category of moral evaluation (Van Leeuwen, 2008) or appeals to emotion and altruism (Reyes, 2011) when the speaker shows concern not only for the in-group to which they belong, but also for a third party.

In the corpus, the third party was represented by the Iranian people (as opposed to their leaders), the victims of Hamas, and the victims of Israel's attacks in the Gaza Strip. The speeches show a key feature of the EU's position as a global actor, that is, showing concern not only for territorial defense, but also for security threats outside the EU's territory (Kirchner, 2006:949). The analyzed parliamentary interventions also reveal a comprehensive understanding of security, which is not reduced to the exclusively militaristic perspective (Lahiry, 2020: 185).

Some speakers used the opposition 'us' versus 'them' in order to criticize Josep Borrell's actions as a VP. The criticism took the explicit form of blaming in C. Weimers's intervention, on behalf of the ECR Group: "(…) Mr Borrell, you're a liar. (…) You shamelessly lied to protect the IRGC. We won't miss you, Mr Borrell, but I'm sure the mullahs will". Weimers began his speech with an "exordium ex abrupto" in the form of a negative evaluation of the VP ("liar"). The reasons for this evaluation were then given, while the end of the speech repeated this evaluation with the verb "to lie". The accusation was intensified by the use of the adverb "shamelessly", construing the target of the

criticism as immoral. The last utterance of the speech constructs the two groups involved in the conflict, 'us' against 'them'. The reference of the first-person plural pronoun here is unclear, as it could refer to the MEPs in the audience, but it could also be understood as a general reference to the 'civilized' world. In contrast, the out-group is represented here by the term "mullahs", meaning Islamic religious leaders. Since the figure of the mullah exists in Shiite Islam and not in the Sunni branch of Islam, the speaker ironically associates Vice President Borrell with Iranian rulers.

The opposition 'us' versus 'them' was also employed by the politician G. Verhofstadt (Renew). The pronoun "we" was repeated two times in the beginning of his intervention and placed in opposition with the pronoun "you", addressed to VP Borrell:

> I think this is my fourth debate, Mr Borrell, about Iran with you and every time the conclusion is the same: we don't like your strategy. We want you to change your strategy.

The verb "to like" indicates here an approach based on emotions. However, the legitimation based on emotions is soon replaced with legitimation through rationality, as the speaker states that "Your strategy of diplomacy and appeasement leads to nothing at all; it does nothing at all". The speaker's evaluation of the diplomatic approach as ineffective is reinforced by the repeated negative pronoun "nothing", followed by the phrase "at all", which adds emphasis. Furthermore, the possessive adjective "your" delegitimizes the diplomatic strategy, indicating that it is not supported by the MEPs. The underlying judgment here is that an ineffective approach needs to be changed. The call for a change in strategy is repeated later by the speaker when he replaces the pronoun "we" with the noun phrase "this Parliament": "So this Parliament asks you to change the strategy, based on real sanctions (…)". In this manner, G. Verhofstadt introduces legitimation through authority (Van Leeuwen, 2008) or through expert positions (Reyes, 2011: 786-787), highlighting the official role of the European Parliament. The mention of the European institution as a subject in need of a change is meant to construct discursive power for the speaker who makes the demand. The attempt to maintain the discursive power is also manifested at the end of the intervention, when Verhofstadt uses a proscription, through a negative imperative clause: "And finally, don't continue with diplomacy towards the regime". The demands formulated by this MEP in his speech are situated in the area of deontic modality, showing

the speaker's commitment to obligation (Fairclough, 2003:168).

The opposition between the two sides in conflict also appears intertwined with legitimation through a hypothetical future. The combination of the two strategies was visible in the interventions mentioning a possible threat to the EU in the future: "Nuclear weapons in the hands of these mullahs will sooner or later be directed not only against Israel, but against all of us", said S. Limmer, speaking as an independent MEP. Here, the phrase "sooner or later" places the threat at an unspecified moment in the future, but the statement shows the speaker's high certainty that such an attack is going to happen.

In contrast to Borrell's speech, the MEPs' interventions revealed an attempt to gain power in the discourse through explicit criticism of the VP, moral evaluations marked by intensifiers, and the use of demands addressed to the VP in the form of prescriptions and prohibitions, signaling that the Parliament had not reached a consensus on the response to the security issue.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This analysis focused on a single debate in the European Parliament on April 24, 2024, after Iran attacked Israel on April 13, 2024. The debate concerned the EU's behavior as a global actor and the possible response to the security issue. The analysis of the transcribed interventions revealed two different points of view. A diplomatic approach was proposed by the then VP/HR, Josep Borrell Fontelles, who argued that only diplomacy could lead to a de-escalation of the conflict.

In order to legitimize his proposal, the VP used the legitimation strategy of rationalization, maintained a moderate and objective tone, and avoided explicit alignment with one of the parties to the conflict, although he reaffirmed the EU's support for Israel. Borrell also used the moral evaluation strategy towards the end of his speech, which was intertwined with the instrumental rationalization strategy; he focused on the desired outcome of the EU intervention.

He insisted that Europe's voice must be "a voice of reason" and that the only reasonable solution to the conflict was to stop the armed violence. In addition to the legitimation strategies employed, the VP used the first-person singular pronoun "I" sparingly and avoided imposing his own point of view as a source of authority. Through his opening speech, the VP constructed his identity as an objective and reasonable politician and diplomat who upholds the interests and values of the EU and

tries to reach a general agreement on a common foreign policy.

A different approach was taken by several MEPs who advocated the adoption of sanctions against Iran. The common legitimation strategy in the speeches was moral evaluation and the construction of two sides, an in-group formed by the EU and the states adhering to the same values, and an out-group formed by the dictatorial regimes. Through moral evaluation and proximization, the threat posed by such regimes and terrorist organizations was presented as concrete and imminent, even to the people of Europe. Furthermore, the in-group was aligned with a third-party represented by the civilian population in the conflict areas and in the states run by dictatorships.

This view confirms previous research that the EU is perceived as a community based on values such as democracy, justice and human rights (Biegoń, 2013: 204). Moreover, the diplomatic approach advocated by the VP was rejected by some MEPs, who argued that a policy of appeasement would only weaken the EU's global role. In their speeches, they criticized Borrell for his apparent refusal to sanction Iran and explicitly associated him with the out-group, suggesting that he did not adhere to European values. Thus, the debate analyzed challenged rather than affirmed the existence of a common European foreign policy.

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ON SOME SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF THE ROMANIAN "*AT/TO*"

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Abstract: *A key property of Romanian Datives is that they can be marked in two distinct ways: inflectionally and prepositionally by the P la "at/to". The two types of marking are dictated by the nature of the determiner which can be variable or invariable and which may or may not realize morphological case. The purpose of this paper is to address two aspects which dictate the acceptability of the prepositional marking in standard Romanian: (a) the animacy/definiteness hierarchies and (b) the singular/plural distinction. Firstly, it will be demonstrated that la-datives express sensitivity to both the animacy and definiteness hierarchies (Aissen 2003; Croft 2003 a.o.); in light of this, it will be shown that only nouns high on the animacy scale are felicitous with la-marking of the dative because they carry a [Person] specification, while abstract nouns, lower on the hierarchy, are not compatible with the la-marking. Secondly, the la-marking is sensitive to the definiteness scale where 1st and 2nd person pronouns are infelicitous with the la-marking as they are strongly individualised, followed by proper names for they are atomic units. Last but not least, following Corbet's (2000) singular/plural distinction, la-datives are preferred with plural nouns as they are not individualised, as opposed to singular nouns which carry this feature and, as a result, makes them dispreferred*

Keywords*: la-dative marking, animacy hierarchy, definiteness, singular-plural distinction*

1. INTRODUCTION

The present article aims at delving into some of the semantic properties of Romanian *la*-datives in ditransitive constructions. One important feature of *la*-datives is that they are *core-datives;* the chief property of core datives is c-selection- core-datives are c-selected and semantically entailed by the V. Core-datives merge low (cf. Moraru-Zamfir, 2023). Therefore, their categorial status can be either DP or PP. Phrases headed by *la* are interpreted as DPs when they can be doubled by clitics (where *la* is interpreted as a functional preposition, while equivalent phrases that cannot be doubled by clitics will be analysed as PPs (where *la* is interpreted as a lexical P, in line with Cornilescu et al. (2017). In light of this, the Romanian *la* "at/to" exhibits a dual status- it is both a (i) *functional dative marker* and also a (ii) *core lexical preposition* with a locative/ directional meaning, with lexical *la* assigning Acc case to its object. In other words, a *la*-phrase is a Dat when it can be clitic-doubled (CD), as shown in (1a,b); the morphology of its complement DP is Acc; yet, starting from the idea that pronominal clitics double DPs, *la*-phrases are considered DPs. It is important to mention that CD is optional with verbs that select [+Person] complements (1a), but mandatory with unaccusatives.

functional *la*
(1) a. (Le)-au   cumpărat   baloane *la* copii.
    they.cl.Dat have bought   balloons to children
    "They have bought balloons to the children."

lexical *la*
    b. Alexandra a mers *la* mama./   ** mamei.
       Alexandra has gone at mother.Acc/ ** mother.Dat
       "Mihaela went to mother."

Romanian exhibits the alternation of nominal constituents marked with Dative with that of PP headed by the functional "la". This alternation is shaped by the following two aspects (cf. Mardale 2008, GOR 2013 a.o): firstly, for DPs with an invariable determiner (e.g. cardinals *la trei* "to three", *niște* "some") *la*-marking is mandatory as shown in (2a) below and secondly, for DPs with a variable determiner case-marking is obligatory as (2b) illustrates (view also adopted in Moraru-Zamfir, 2023). Some constituents (e.g. câtorva "some") allow both types of marking which bear the same syntactic and interpretative properties, but with a stylistic difference: the inflectional marking is specific to standard Romanian while the

prepositional marking pertains to non-standard language (see 3(a, b) below).

(2) a. Am dat (baloane) *la doi* copii.
   have given balloons LA two children
   "I have given balloons to two children."
 b. M-am opus *întregului* grup.
   meRefl.-have opposed entire-the.DAT group.
   "I opposed the entire group"

(3) a. A mulțumit *câtorva* profesori.
   has thanked some.DAT professors
   "(S)he thanked some professors."
 b. A mulțumit *la câtiva* profesori.
   has thanked LA some professors
   "(S)he thanked some professors."

As mentioned, the choice between *la*-marking and case-marking is dictated by a morphological property: the nature of the determiner which may or may not realize morphological case. Thus, if the determiner is *invariable* the inflectional dative is replaced by the P construction with "la"; this time only the prepositional marking becomes the only option and therefore the inflectional dative cannot be realised.

Let us consider the classes of determiners that dictate the choice between the two types of marking (inflectional/prepositional). As suggested above, for DPs with *invariable determiners*, la-marking is mandatory and the only option; interestingly the P *la* "at/to" keeps its original allative value (cf. GOR 2013) (see 4(a-e) below).

cardinal numbers (*doi* "two", *trei* "three")
(4) a. Am oferit (premii) **la trei** copii.
   have offered prizes LA three pupils
   "I have offered prizes to three pupils"

indefinites (*niște* "some")
 b. Am dat (cadouri) **la niște** foste studente.
   have give presents LA some former students.
   "I have given presents to some former students."

quantifiers (*tot* "everything")
  M-am adresat **la tot** plutonul.
  MeRefl-have address LA whole platoon-the
  "I spoke to the whole platoon"

emphatic determiners (*însuși* "(his/it)self")
  M-am adresat **la însuși** directorul medical.
  MeRefl-have address LA himself medical director-the
  "I spoke to the medical director himself."

adjectives (*astfel de* "such")
  Nu dau informații la **astfel de** oameni
  Give information LA such people.DAT
  "I don't give information to such people"

For DPs with *variable* determiners, the inflectional dative becomes a mandatory choice, at least in standard Romanian (see 5 (a-e), 6(a) and 7 (a,b) below).

q(uantificational)-determiners (*întreg* "whole", *fiecare* "every", *orice* "any", *mulți* "many", *puțini* "few", *câțiva* "some")
(5) a. M-am adresat **întregului** sat.
   MeRefl.-have addressed entire-the $_{DAT}$ village
   "I spoke to the whole village"
                  (Mardale 2008: 151)
 b. Am oferit flori **fiecărei** sarbătorite.
   Have given flowers every birthday girl.DAT
   "I gave flowers to every birthday girl"
 c. Am dat sfaturi **multor** studenți.
   Have given advice many students.DAT
   "I gave advice to many students."
 d. M-am adresat **puținilor** studenți
   rămași la conferință.
   meRefl.- have addressed few students.DAT
   left at the conference
   "I spoke to the few students left at the conference."
 e. A telefonat **câtorva** rude.
   has phoned some relatives
   "(S)he called some relatives"

articles (un "a")
(7) a. M-am adresat **unui** elev.
   meRefl.- have addressed a$_{DAT}$ pupil
   "I spoke to a pupil"

demonstratives (acest "this", acel "that")
(8) a. Am dat un premiu **acestui** elev.
   have give an award this pupil.
   "I have given an award to this pupil
 b. Am dat o carte **acelei** eleve.
   have give book that pupil.
   "I have given a book to that pupil

Other constituents, such as the q-determiner *câțiva* "some" allow both types of marking (case-marking and *la*-marking), as suggested by Mardale (2008:151).

(9) a. A telefonat **câtorva** colegi.
   has phone$_{PastPart}$ some$_{Dat}$ colleagues
   "(S)he called some colleagues"
                  (Mardale 2008:151)
 b. A telefonat **la câțiva** colegi.
   has phone$_{PastPart}$ LA some colleagues
   "(S)he called some colleagues"
                  (Mardale 2008:151)

In dialectal Romanian, especially in the spoken language, la-marking is preferred even in those situations where its presence is not dictated morphologically. Let us consider 10 (a, b) where

the IO is realized as a PP headed by the P *la*, even if the determiner has case inflection.

(10) a. Le-am   dăruit   cadouri
     la bunici/   bunicilor.
     CL.DAT.3PL=(I) have given presents.PL.ACC
     to grandparents.ACC/ grandparents.DEF.DAT
     "I offered the grandparents presents"
                    (Diaconescu and Rivero 2007: 230)
     b. Dă-i   **la** mama.
     give.2SG DAT.CL to mother.
      "Give (it) to mother!"
                    (Diaconescu and Rivero 2007: 230)

In certain regional variants of contemporary Romanian, the IO is replaced by a PP headed by *către* "towards", as (11a) suggests.

(11) a. A   zis bunicul   către cerșetor
     să   plece.
     Has said grandfather.DEF.NOM toward beggar
     să$_{SUBJ}$ leave.SUBJ.3SG
     "The grandfather said to the beggar to leave"

So far, we have shown that Romanian determiners dictate the type of marking of the Dat: (a) invariable determiners ("some", *tot* "everything" etc.) call for the prepositional marking of the Dat and (b) variable determiners (*întreg* "whole", *fiecare* "every") require the inflectional marking of the Dat, while some determiners allow both types of marking.

The next section addresses the distribution of *la* in standard Romanian, following the animacy/definiteness hierarchies and the singular/plural distinction.

2. THE DISTRIBUTION OF *LA* FOLLOWING ANIMACY/DEFINITENESS HIERARCHIES

The paper suggests that *la*-datives rely on a combination of several overlapping hierarchies: (a) the Animacy Hierarchy (Human > Animate > Inanimate), a Nominal Hierarchy (pronouns > nouns) and a Person Hierarchy (1st > 2nd > 3rd). Let us start the analysis from the (a) referential hierarchy (Richards 2008) illustrated below in (12) which itself comprises two hierarchies: person/animacy and person/definiteness (see (13a, b) below) and from (b) the plural marking-hierarchy proposed in Corbett (2000), shown in (14).

(12) Silverstein person/animacy scale
                    (Silverstein 1976, Dixon 1994)
     1/2 –person (pron.) > 3-person (pron.) >
     animate (3-person) > inanimate (3-person)

Agents/ Subjects	…	Patients/Objects
Definite		Indefinite

(cf. Richards 2008:138)

(13) a. person/animacy scale
     1/2 – person pron. >animate (3-person, pron/noun) > inanimate (3-person, pron./noun)
                    (cf. Richards 2008:141)
     b. person/ definiteness scale
     1/2- person (pron.)> 3-person (pron.) >definite> specific> nonspecific
                    (cf. Richards 2008:141)

(14) 1st person > 2nd person> 3rd person> kin> human> animate> inanimate
                    (cf. Corbett 2000, 90)

Following the person/animacy scale, if we start the analysis with the left of the scale, person nominals bare the following key characteristics: they are [+animate] and [+definite] and they ask for a 1st, 2nd or 3rd person specification. Let us consider the verb *a da* "give". As shown in (15a) and (16a) and (16b) *la*-marking of the Dative is srongly dispreferred with first- and second-person pronouns, in both singular and plural. This occurs because 1st and 2nd person pronouns are highly individualised bearing a [definite] feature. One can observe in (15a) and (16a) that the clitics is also sensitive with 1st and 2nd person pronouns.

(15) a. ?? Dă-(mi)   *la* mine   coșul   cu cireșe.
     give (cl.dat.1sg)   LA me   basket with cherries
     "Give the cherry basket to me."
     a'. Dă-mi   mie coșul   cu   cireșe.
     give.cl.dat.1sg me   basket with cherries
     "Give me the cherry basket."

(16) a. *Iți   dau   *la* tine cheia.
     cl.dat.2sg dau   LA you   key.the
     "I give the key to you."
     a'. Iți   dau   ție   cheia.
     cl.dat.2sg give   you   key.the
     "I give you the key."
     b. *Vă   dau   *la* voi   cheia.
     cl.dat.2pl give   LA you   key.the
     "I give the key to you."
     b'. Vă   dau   vouă   cheia.
     cl.dat.2pl give   you   key.the
     "I give you the key."

It is important to mention here that it has long been commonly accepted in the literature (Forchheimer 1953; Benveniste 1966, Ritter 2002 a.o.) the difference between (a) 1st and 2nd person

pronouns and (b) 3rd person pronouns. The [Person] feature belongs only to first and second person pronouns (I/you) while third person pronouns lack this feature, they are unmarked. To quote Forchheimer (1953: 5-6), third person "remains in the great pool of the impersonal".

Examples from CoRoLa illustrate that in non-standard language, Romanian *la*-datives occur with third person pronouns, as shown in (17a, b) (cf. Moraru-Zamfir, 2023)

In non-standard Romanian, *la*-datives occur with 3rd person pronouns as examples from CoRoLa illustrate (see (17) below):

(17) a. ?? (…) dă la ei   tot ce ai,   poate aşa
    scapi   de necaz (…)
    give   LA them all have got, maybe this way
    you escape from trouble.the
    " (…) give everything you have got to them, maybe this way you'll escape from the trouble (…)"

    a'. Dă-le   lor tot ce ai,   poate aşa
    scapi   de necaz.
    Give.cl.dat.3pl them all have got, maybe this way
    you escape   from trouble.the
    "Give them everything you have got, maybe this way you'll escape from the trouble"

La-datives are illicit with proper names because they are strongly individualized. However, in dialectal Romanian la-datives do occur with proper names the examples found on Google suggest (as also discussed in Avram 1997; Iorga 2013 a.o.)

(18) a. ?? Îi   dau reţeta   *la* Maria.
    CL.DAT.3SG give recipie.the LA Maria
    "I give the recipe to Mary"
    a'. Îi   dau cartea   Mariei.
    CL.DAT.3SG give book.the Mary.DAT
    "I give the book to Mary"

The literature (Kripke 1972) describes proper names as "saturated expressions" or as "rigid designators", following the Fregean tradition. One explanation for this would be the very idea that they refer to the same individual in all possible worlds. Following Longobardi (1994), they are analysed as <e> type expressions, with an internal syntactic structure with a definite feature. Being atomic units, strongly individualised, the degree of acceptability with the la-dative goes towards the inferior line of acceptability, similar to pronouns.

As suggested in (19a) below, *la*-datives occur with common nouns specified for 3rd person, in the singular, with a referential reading. However, the example in (19b) is preferred in standard language.

In (19c) the demonstrative *ăsta* "this" highlights the referential reading of the noun, thus making the degree of acceptability of the la-marking low.

(19) a. ?? Ii   dau o carte *la* fată.
    CL.DAT.3SG give a book LA girl
    "I give a book to the girl"
    a'. Ii   dau o carte fetei.
    CL.DAT.3SG give a book girl.DAT
    "I give a book to the girl."
    b. ??? Dă *la* mama   revistele.
    give   LA mother magazines.the
    "Give the magazines to mum"
    (Avram 2004)
    b'. Dă-i   mamei   revistele.
    give CL.DAT.3SG mum   magazines.the
    "Give mum the magazines"
    c. ?? Emite-i   un cec *la* băiatul ăsta.
    draw.CL.DAT.3SG a check LA boy   this
    "Draw a check to this boy"
    c'. Emite-i   un cec băiatului.
    draw.CL.DAT.3SG a check boy.DAT
    "Draw this boy a check."

However specific to non-standard Romanian, *La*-datives occur with collective nouns, also known as "group nouns" (Leech 1989) (*personal* "staff", *echipă* "team", *comitet* "committee", *popor* "people", *trupă* "troop", *congregaţie* "congregation", biserică "church" etc.) with a [+human] reference, carrying a 3rd person specification. As noted by Tănase- Dogaru (2009) collective nouns accept countable quantifiers, determiners, plural markers and plural anaphoric pronouns.

(20) a. Managerul dă   bonusuri *la* personal.
    manager   gives bonuses LA staff
    "The manager gives bonuses to the staff"
    a'. Managerul dă   bonusuri personalului.
    manager   gives bonuses staff.Dat
    "The manager gives the staff bonuses"
    b. Comandantul dă   ordine *la* pluton.
    commander   gives orders LA platoon
    "The commander gives orders to the platoon"
    b'. Comandantul dă   ordine plutonului.
    commander   gives orders platoon.Dat
    "The commander gives the platoon orders"
    c. Primarul a trimis ajutoare băneşti *la* nevoiaşi.
    Mayor   sent   support financial LA poor.the
    "The mayor has sent financial support to the poor."

Furthermore, *la*- datives can occur with nouns with [+animate], [-human] features (see 24(a-b) below) and, as the examples suggest they are better tolerated with the prepositional frame, for DPs lower on the animacy better tolerate the *la*-marking.

(24) a. Fetița   împarte mâncarea *la* pisici.
        girl.the shares food.the LA cats.
        "The girl shares the food to the cats."
        Fetița   împarte mâncarea pisicilor.
        girl.the shares food.the   cats.Dat
        "The girl shares the cats the food"
        Fetița   dă   mâncare *la* cățel.
        girl.the gives food   LA dog.
        "The girl gives food to the dog"
        Fetița   dă   mâncare câinelui.
        The girl gives food   dog.Dat
        "The girl gives the dog food".

La is also used with common nouns with a [+human] feature, singular/plural and with a generic, non-specific reading. In contrast to (24a-b) where the nouns have a referential reading, in (25a,b) the nouns have a generic reading and they are situated lower on the definiteness hierarchy; thus, we make the claim that they better tolerate the prepositional construction.

(25) a. Primarul   a oferit   haine   *la* orfani.
        mayor.the has offered clothes LA orphans.
        "The mayor has offered clothes to the orphans"
     b. Primarul   a oferit   haine   orfanilor.
        mayor.the has offered clothes orphans.Dat
        "The mayor has offered the orphans shelter."

Moreover, *la* is used with common nouns with a [-human][-animate] features, in the singular/plural.

(26) a. A   pus îngrășământ *la* plante.
        has put fertilizers   to plants.the
        "He has put fertilizers to the plants."
     a'. *?A pus îngrășământ plantelor.
        has put fertilizers   plants.the
        "He has put fertilizers to the plants."
     b. A   adăugat miere *la* limonadă.
        has added   honey to lemonade.the
        "He has added honey to the lemonade."
     b'. *?A adăugat miere   limonadei.
        has added   honey   lemonade.Dat
        "He has added honey to the lemonade"

One observation is in order here. *La*-datives are endowed with an intepretable [person] feature, which brings about sensitivity to the animacy scale. That is why, functional *la* cannot occur with abstract nouns, because only nouns prominent on the hierarchy, endowed with [+animate] [+person] features are tolerated with the *la*-marking of the dative. In other words, the [*i*person] feature represents an s-selectional requirement of the DP *la* combines with and it brings along sensitivity to the animacy scale. Consider the examples in (27a-

b) where *la*-dative cannot occur with abstract nouns, in sharp contrast to the inflectional marking of the dative.

(27) a. *A supus   proiectul *la* atenția
        organizației.
        has submitted project.the to attention
        organization.the
        "He submitted the project to the organisation's attention"
     a'. A supus   proiectul atenției
        organizației.
        has submitted project.the attention.the.dat
        organisation.the.gen
        "He submitted the project to the board's attention"

3. CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the present examination has revealed that the P *la* exhibits sensitivity to both the animacy and definiteness hierarchies where *la* is preferred with nouns high on the animacy scale; abstract nouns are infelicitous with the *la*-marking. In line with the definiteness hierarchy, 1st and 2nd person pronouns and proper names are strongly individualised and they are dispreferred with the *la*-marking.

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Hybridity & Virtual Communities

FIGHTING ONLINE HARASSMENT: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

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Abstract: *Online harassment, primarily targeting children but also affecting other social groups, remains one of the most severe issues in the digital environment. Recent developments in emerging technology-driven algorithms have introduced powerful tools in this field, playing a dual role: on one hand, they can exacerbate the phenomenon, while on the other, prevent it. Traditional methods (laws, counselling, education) increasingly blend with technology-driven solutions (generative AI, machine learning, automated moderation), being a double edge sword because of ethical concerns including bias, privacy, and AI-related inaccuracies. This article compares traditional versus modern approaches, evaluates policy gaps, and recommends legislative improvements to transform technology into an effective safeguard against cyberbullying.*

Keywords: *cyberbullying; online harassment; cyberbullying legislation*

1. INTRODUCTION

The migration of interpersonal interaction to digital platforms has amplified secondary phenomena such as cyber-bullying. Online disinhibition, anonymity and the instantaneous, borderless spread of information jointly increase both incidence and harm, while simultaneously undermining traditional control levers (parental supervision, school discipline, national jurisdiction). Understanding the main risk factors and behavioral patterns of cyberbullying in youth is considered a condition for identifying the main methods of intervention. Emerging technologies, however, have allowed the emergence of new, automated ways of combating the phenomenon, such as generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI), machine learning and automatic content moderation systems, and these tools have the potential to identify abusive behaviors. This article compares classical and modern approaches, audits the international and Romanian legal frameworks, exposes policy gaps, and proposes legislative steps to turn technological progress from a potential risk into a real safeguard against cyberbullying.

2. CYBERBULLYING: A UBIQUITOUS PHENOMENON

Unprecedented technological progress and its ephemeral trends, such as the 'explosion' of generative artificial intelligence and extended reality (XR), impact our lives profound that it may change the way individuals live their lives (Lesenciuc, 2024). And cyberbullying is no exception, affecting everyone individually and together.

The Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study (Badura *et al.*, 2024)*,* a unique cross-national study of adolescent health and well-being in Europe and North America, confirms the rise in cyberbullying among adolescents in 44 countries in Europe, Central Asia and Canada, highlighting gender differences in online bullying behavior, with boys more likely to bully online and girls reporting a higher tendency to be victims. It also proposes interventions to prevent and combat this phenomenon, involving teachers, parents and policy makers to promote digital literacy and safety. In full agreement with these objectives, the approach of a British child protection charity - the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), founded in 1883 by Thomas Agnew, has highlighted that over three quarters of British citizens want to check the safety of children with new generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) products, due to identified risks such as sexual harassment, bullying, sextortion (blackmail for sexual favors) and the proliferation of harmful content (NSPCC, 2025) through constantly mobilizing government efforts to proactively

identify measures and regulations to prevent and counter the risks specific to the unprecedented use of technological solutions. Office for National Statistics data from 2020 shows that one in five children aged 10-15 in the UK and Wales (19%) have experienced at least one type of online bullying behavior; one in four have not reported their experiences to anyone; three in four children who have experienced online bullying behavior have experienced at least some of it at school or during school. It should be added that the UK is the best practice example of a strategic approach to regulating artificial intelligence (AI).

In 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council, Mama Fatima Singhateh (Gambia), warned of the urgent need to put children's rights at the center of the development and regulation of the internet and new digital products, given the 87% increase in child sexual abuse material since 2019 to date. She highlights the rise in harmful manifestations including the use of technology-assisted child sexual abuse and exploitation material, against which the tech industry has been shown to be less reliable than it claims to be.

EU Kids Online (2020) mapped internet access, online practices, skills, online risks and opportunities for children aged 9-16 (25.101 children) in 19 European countries, including Romania and revealed that situation is not at all different from that in other parts of the world, in the sense that children are repeatedly (at least monthly) bullied online (5%) and in traditional form (7%) from pre-adolescence. The Romanian chapter (2019) of EU Kids Online was a comprehensive study that collected data from a nationally representative sample (935 children, aged 9-17 years), presenting data on online practices, digital skills, risks and opportunities that Romanian children and adolescents have encountered online, as well as data on cyberbullying and hate speech (hate speech or cyberhate). The study reported an increase in children's self-reported negative online experiences (33% in 2018 compared to 21% in 2010). In addition, boys and girls, in equal proportions, have had negative experiences online, with the 9-10 age group being the most exposed to such experiences (29%), and boys, more than girls, being at risk of cyberbullying, probably also due to their longer presence on gaming platforms. At the same time, it is alarming that teenagers aged 15-17 were the most exposed to cyber-hate and witnessed online bullying, with almost half of them doing nothing to support the victim, 7% of them encouraging the bully, and 8% sending hate messages online themselves.

The work of the organization "Save the Children" reflects the constant concern for knowledge, prevention and awareness of cyberbullying, through social programs, public policies and sound practices for the benefit of the Romanian child. It addresses children, parents, teachers and public authorities that can contribute to reducing the psycho-social impact of cyberbullying on young people in Romania.

In this context, although vast literature has existed for more than two decades, the critical need for a standardized conceptual framework is underlined, more so as cyberbullying has become a significant public health problem.

Various researches confirm the consistent associations between Machiavelism, psychopathy, narcissism and sadism known as te Dark Tetrad, as traits of personalities of cyberbullying behaviors (Buckels *et al.*, 2014; Sest & March, 2017; Gajda *et al.*, 2023; Alavi *et al.*, 2023) suggesting the need for interventions tailored to the personality profiles of online aggressors with Generative AI help.

3. CYBERBULLYING IN INTERNATIONAL AND ROMANIAN LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Although it is a global phenomenon, with similar patterns of manifestation throughout the world, the regulations aimed at combating cyberbullying are different across jurisdictions. For our paper, we chose to analyze the main legislative texts in Europe and internationally, as the relevant ones, to better understand the gaps in Romanian legislation and to propose remedial measures. At the European Union level, although there are no acts that specifically combat cyberbullying, several important legislative texts have been adopted recently that aim to combat harmful online behaviors:

a) *The Digital Services Act (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065)* aims to combat the spread of illegal content and to protect the fundamental rights of users by regulating online marketplaces, social media, very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large online search engines (VLOSEs). Cyberbullying is limited by the fact that VLOPs have the obligation to identify and mitigate the risks associated with dangerous content, which includes cyberbullying.

b) *The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2018/1808 – Amendment of Directive 2010/13/EU)* was to be implemented in the national legislation of the Member States by 19 September 2020 and regulates video-sharing platforms with the objective of protecting the rights of minors and preventing any incitement to hatred and violence, implicitly cyberbullying.

c) *The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* address European citizens' rights from all perspectives, tackling cyberbullying also. The GDPR introduced the "right to erasure" (Art. 17), which can be requested by those who consider themselves victims of online harassment so that their personal data can no longer be made available online.

In addition, a series of soft legislation has been formulated at European level, which, although not imposing legislative obligations, sets out the framework within which interpersonal relations in the cyber environment should take place, such as the *Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online (2016)* (agreed with Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube in 2016, Instagram, Snapchat and Dailymotion in 2018, Jeuxvideo.com in 2019, TikTok in 2020 and LinkedIn 2021) and *the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee* (2021).

The concern for combating cyberbullying is also reflected in the documents adopted at international level, even nonbinding, as *United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 69/158 and 71/176 Protecting children from Bullying.*

Also, *The Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention (2011)* approached the subject of online bullying by addressing the psychological effects of violence and harassment carried out through online communication channels.

The concern for combating cyberbullying is relatively old and the angle of approach to the issue at European and international level differs, being considered channels such as those specific to social media, but also streaming, spheres of private/public life such as education, family, group of friends, all from the perspective of protecting the fundamental rights of the child and the person.

Romania has the obligation to comply with these regulations and to introduce into its own legislation those elements that ensure the elimination of the aforementioned risks within a broader concept of systemic governance in cyberspace (Georgescu *et al.,* 2020). For a long time, Romanian legislation did not explicitly refer to cyberbullying and approached combating the phenomenon by concatenating measures that lead to fight against its component dimensions. Thus, legal texts that refer to criminality, domestic violence, child protection, GDPR, and anti-discrimination legislation are considered sufficient to prevent all types of online harassment. Thus, in *the Romanian Penal Code (Law no. 286/2009)*, article 208 generally defines harassment so as to include communication through electronic means that induces fear, as well as threats (Art. 206), blackmail (Art. 207), and, in extreme cases, incitement to suicide (Art. 191), but legal repercussions can only be activated if there is a prior complaint from the victim.

For situations of slander and defamation, civil sanctions are applied in Romania in accordance with the responsibilities provided for in Articles 1349–1357 of *the Civil Code*, which are complemented by audiovisual legislation (Law 504/2002) and by the provisions of *Government Ordinance 137/2000 for any type of discriminatory content based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion*, etc.

In the field of education, consolidated steps have been taken to combat bullying. Thus, *the Law on Preuniversity Education* requires the adoption of the National Plan for Combating School Violence (art. 65) and defines bullying for the first time, although it limits this phenomenon only to spaces intended for education and professional training. However, in accordance with this law, there is a concern for the training of teachers to prevent and combat psychological violence (art. 10, letter i), information, counseling and support services are offered for victims of any form of violence in the school environment, including bullying, cyberbullying, harassment (art. 120, letter j).

The Law on preventing and combating domestic violence (Law 217/2003) was amended by Law no. 106/2020 to specifically include cyber-violence as a form of abuse. This legal innovation recognizes online harassment by intimate partners or family members as domestic violence, enabling victims to seek protection orders that restrict any form of contact, including digital communication. Also, child protection legislation (e.g., *Law 272/2004* and the *Education Law no. 198/2023*) obliges the responsible authorities to notify and intervene in the situation where any psychological abuse occurs, including cyberbullying.

Of course, European Union regulations (E.G. GDPR) are respected in Romania, complementing national regulations. Despite the efforts made to combat this phenomenon, Romania is currently lagging behind the level of ambition that documents such as the *Digital Services Act (DSA)* and *Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act)* propose. Thus, the DSA requirements must be translated into clear national regulations targeting VLOPs and local tech companies and expressly requiring them to combat the phenomenon.

Also, in accordance with the AI Act, Romania has to classify AI systems according to the risk they pose – in this context, there is a possibility that current tools for identifying cyberbullying to be associated with a major risk because they have the possibility to profile children. Therefore, national policies in this area need to be complemented with very detailed ethical regulations, with provisions regarding the management of technical errors and human supervision, so that these tools can continue to be used safely.

Of course, legislative harmonization should start with defining cyberbullying and bullying as a stand-alone phenomenon, likely to be encountered in diverse environments and with clear specificities in relation to psychological violence or cyber violence. A legislative act dedicated to bullying/ cyberbullying would be desirable, in order to bring together and harmonize all facets of the phenomenon and could regulate: the functioning of a committee responsible for identifying and combating the phenomenon, the way online platforms respond, the need for knowledge of rights in online space among magistrates, media education to avoid these situations, the inclusion of specific provisions for cyberbullying in the GDPR.

4. TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY METHODS OF COMBATING CYBERBULLYING

Complementary to regulatory dimension, cyberbullying necessitates a comprehensive strategy that integrates both traditional and artificial intelligence-based methods to mitigate its detrimental effects on individuals and communities.

encompass manual reporting mechanisms where victims or witnesses report incidents to platform administrators or relevant authorities. Furthermore, community awareness campaigns play a crucial role in educating individuals about the nature of cyberbullying, its impact, and strategies for prevention and intervention (Topor, 2024, Snakenborg *et al.*, 2011). AI-based methods utilize natural language processing and machine learning to analyze online content, identify cyberstalking, remove harmful content, provide emotional support via chatbots, perform predictive analysis, and power parental control apps (Frommholz *et al.*, 2016; Nguyen, 2023). AI offers speed and scalability but faces challenges like bias in algorithms, difficulty understanding context, false positives/negatives, and ethical concerns like privacy (Milosevic et al., 2022).

In Table 1, we compare these two approaches, noting AI's advantage in speed and scalability while acknowledging traditional methods' importance in emotional support and nuanced understanding, and also highlighting the challenges and limitations of AI, such as bias, context understanding, and ethical considerations like privacy. When addressing cyberbullying through AI-based methods, ethical considerations and human oversight are crucial. Human participation is essential in establishing clear guidelines, policies, and standards to govern the use of AI in cyberbullying mitigation. Humans must carefully curate the data used to train AI models, audit the algorithms for biases, and set up transparent processes for appealing AI-driven decisions. Additionally, human experts should interpret AI-generated insights, providing contextual understanding and making final determinations on appropriate actions.

Dimension	Human-centered methods	AI-based methods

Traditional methods, characterized by human intervention and community-driven initiatives,

Table 1. Comparison of human-centered and AI-based methods for addressing cyberbullying

Primary identification mechanisms	Manual reporting by victims/bystanders (to platforms, schools, authorities); Observation of behavioral changes; Community awareness and education; Peer support.	Automated analysis of online content (text, image, video) using NLP, ML, Deep Learning; Pattern detection (e.g., cyberstalking, grooming); Sentiment analysis, keyword spotting.
Primary combating mechanisms	Reporting procedures leading to platform/authority action (content removal, sanctions); Community support systems (counseling, helplines); Educational programs (digital literacy, empathy); Policy implementation & enforcement; Stigmatization (debated effectiveness).	Automated content filtering/removal; Automated user blocking/flagging; AI-powered chatbots for victim support & guidance; Predictive analysis for early warning/intervention; Parental monitoring tools.
Accuracy & nuance	Potentially higher accuracy in understanding complex social context, intent, and subtle cues; Prone to subjectivity, human bias, and overlooking subtle or hidden bullying.	Can achieve high accuracy on specific, defined tasks (e.g., detecting hate speech keywords); Struggles significantly with context, sarcasm, irony, cultural nuances, evolving language (slang, codes).
Scalability & coverage	Difficult and resource-intensive to scale; effectiveness limited by available human resources and community engagement; relies on individual reporting.	Highly scalable; can process vast amounts of data across multiple platforms simultaneously with relatively lower marginal cost per user.
Strengths	Empathy, deep contextual understanding (potentially), addressing root causes (via education/support), community building, fostering positive social norms, flexibility in handling complex cases.	Speed, scalability, consistency (in applying defined rules), ability to handle massive data volumes, 24/7 operation, detection of large-scale patterns.
Weaknesses & challenges	Scalability limitations, slow response, potential for human bias/inconsistency, underreporting (victim fear/shame), difficulty detecting anonymous/subtle forms, resource-intensive.	Context-blindness, algorithmic bias (from data/design), false positives (censorship) & false negatives (missed cases), adversarial attacks (evasion tactics), transparency / accountability issues ("black box"), privacy concerns.
Ethical considerations	Ensuring fair application of policies, avoiding undue stigmatization, providing adequate support resources, maintaining confidentiality in reporting.	Privacy violations (surveillance), algorithmic bias leading to discrimination, lack of transparency and accountability, potential for over-censorship and chilling effects on free speech.
Role of human oversight	Core component; methods inherently rely on human judgment, reporting, intervention, and support.	Essential; needed for handling complex / ambiguous cases, appeals, managing bias, interpreting nuanced situations, ensuring fairness, and providing empathetic support AI cannot replicate ("human-in-the-loop").
Adaptability to evolving tactics	Relies on ongoing education and awareness to recognize new forms of bullying; human adaptability can be slow to recognize novel technological misuse.	Requires continuous retraining with new data to keep up with evolving language, symbols, and evasion tactics used by bullies; can be vulnerable to novel adversarial methods.

The privacy and data rights of individuals must also be carefully considered. AI-based methods that collect and process personal information must adhere to data protection regulations and obtain informed consent from users. Oversight is needed to ensure that the use of AI does not infringe on individual privacy or enable unwarranted surveillance. Ultimately, the integration of traditional and AI-based approaches to address cyberbullying should be guided by a balanced and ethical framework that leverages the strengths of both, while prioritizing the protection of vulnerable individuals and upholding fundamental human rights.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, following the analysis carried out on these works, we highlighted not only the gravity of the phenomenon, but also the particularities in which it can be combated in a unitary technological and legislative approach. We highlighted the urgent need for conventional methods of fighting this phenomenon to be integrated with modern ones, such as generative AI, machine learning algorithms, and automated moderation tools, so that the evolution of the phenomenon can be effectively kept under control. Although the need to use these technologies is obvious, there are ethical risks, in the sphere of privacy, algorithmic bias, and the accuracy of AI-driven interventions. Therefore, in order to identify the best technical solutions and legislative regulations, the joint effort of developers and policymakers is necessary. In Romania, a balanced dedicated legal text is needed, which includes references to education, ethics and the most appropriate mix between traditional and modern approaches to countering the phenomenon.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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AI: THE BEAST THAT FEEDS THE BEAST IN THE PERFECT STORM OF HYBRID WARFARE

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Abstract: *The present paper examines the dual-use nature of AI (its capacity to serve both civilian and military applications) and its role in amplifying hybrid threats. Drawing on a qualitative methodology that includes literature review and strategic foresight methods, the study analyzes how AI technologies are being integrated into conflict environments. A key focus is placed on the role of data as both a foundational asset and a crucial point of vulnerability. AI systems depend on large datasets for training and performance, yet this dependence also exposes them to manipulation, corruption, and adversarial exploitation. As such, control over data is rapidly becoming a central element of strategic competition. The paper presents five future-oriented scenarios to illustrate how dual-use AI can lead to unpredictable escalations, compromised infrastructures, and blurred distinctions between civilian and military domains. These scenarios provide actionable insights into potential developments, including the risks posed by open-source proliferation, AI-enabled disinformation, and compromised supply chains. Ultimately, this study argues for the need to embed ethical principles, regulatory oversight, and anticipatory governance into AI development and deployment. Without robust safeguards and a commitment to resilience, AI may evolve into a destabilizing force in hybrid warfare, accelerating arms races and undermining international stability rather than enhancing security.*

Keywords: *artificial intelligence; dual-use technologies; hybrid warfare; resilience; strategic foresight*

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has increasingly become a dominant theme across academic, political, media and strategic discourse. Driven in part by a growing fear of being left behind, AI is now prominently featured in major policy reports, international conferences, and public debates. Despite the lack of specific conceptual boundaries, its perceived potential to transform nearly every domain of society (economics, politics, warfare, and daily life) has promoted it to a central position in global discourse (often framed as comparable in scale to electricity or a full industrial revolution). The growing interest reflects not only the tangible capabilities of AI, but also the broader expectations, strategic ambitions, and underlying anxieties that societies associate with emerging technologies. While the enthusiasm surrounding AI can sometimes be speculative or overstated, it is nonetheless grounded in the very real and transformative impact this technology is beginning to exert across both civilian and military domains. For the purposes of this paper, AI is understood as *agents that receive percepts from the environment and perform actio*ns (Russell & Norvig, 2020:31-

40), a definition that emphasizes its functional and decision-making capabilities within dynamic environments. Central to AI's functionality are data and algorithms. Data serves as the foundational input, enabling AI systems to learn and make decisions. Algorithms, on the other hand, provide structured procedures that process this data to produce desired outcomes (Hurbans, 2020:3-6).

The objective of this article is to explore the dual-use nature of AI and its implications for contemporary security dynamics, with particular emphasis on hybrid threats and ethical challenges. In line with this objective, the guiding research question is: *How does the dual-use nature of AI contribute to hybrid threats and strategic vulnerabilities?* This research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in literature review, comparative analysis, and scenario-based foresight. The study draws on a broad range of sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles and policy reports. These materials provide the foundations for understanding the dual-use nature of AI, as well as the operational, ethical, and strategic dimensions of its application.

To assess potential future developments, the study applies foresight methods, specifically trend

analysis and scenario development, to identify emerging risks linked to AI in the military domain, ethical issues and hybrid threats. While this study does not involve new primary data collection, it incorporates original findings from the author's previous research in the field (which includes foresight workshops, expert interviews, and consultations with practitioners). These insights, combined with existing literature, support a forward-looking analysis of emerging trends and risks. One limitation of this approach is its reliance on secondary sources and existing data, which may not fully capture rapidly evolving developments or classified dimensions of military AI use. To address this, the study integrates foresight methods that enable exploration of plausible futures beyond the constraints of currently available data, thereby enhancing its relevance for anticipating and mitigating emerging risks.

2. DELINEATING AI'S DUAL-USE POTENTIAL

Hal Brands and Charles Edel (2019) argue that the postwar international order was constructed upon a collective memory of past catastrophes of two world wars and the Cold War and a firm determination to prevent their recurrence. War was envisioned as something to be memorialized rather than re-experienced, serving as a reminder of tragedy rather than a recurring event. Despite these aspirations, the hope that war could be definitively eliminated proved overly optimistic. Rather than disappearing, conflict evolved, adapting itself into novel forms, especially through emerging technological innovations within cyberspace and digital realms. Technological advancements, from aircraft to mechanized vehicles, have consistently reshaped the nature of warfare (Freedman, 2013). Current technological developments continue this trajectory, introducing elements such as data-driven surveillance, cyberattacks, drones, hybrid threats, algorithmic manipulation, and mis- and disinformation campaigns.

Artificial intelligence, promoted constantly as a transformative force, is becoming increasingly central to debates around the nature of future conflicts (Romele, 2024, Payne, 2023). AI has often become a catch-all label encompassing big data, machine learning, automation, and a range of computational advances. This conceptual ambiguity complicates both public understanding and policy development, particularly when assessing the strategic implications of AI in military contexts. This technology fuels both practical innovations and intense speculation, building perceptions of warfare as potentially risk-free, remote, and morally detached. AI-enabled systems promise enhanced speed and precision, but more importantly, they introduce the possibility of shifting ethical and legal responsibility away from humans. Military programmers, operators, and political leaders become progressively distanced from direct accountability as decision-making becomes outsourced to algorithms (Johnson, 2022). This fosters the dangerous illusion of a rational, sanitized form of warfare, presented as capable of transcending human limitations, and simultaneously dehumanizing the battlefield and diluting lines of responsibility.

Integral to these developments are the narratives and imaginaries constructed around AI. These stories range from realistic portrayals grounded in technological realities to speculative and culturally influenced visions shaped by fear, desire, or aspiration (Cave & Dihal, 2023; Cave *et al.*, 2020). Such narratives not only reflect what AI is currently capable of, but project collective expectations: an extension of human control, a potential savior, a threatening rival, or a substitute for human judgment. Within military contexts, these imaginaries significantly influence strategic thinking and operational expectations, sometimes presenting AI as a nearly autonomous actor. In doing so, they obscure the reality that AI systems remain, at their core, algorithmic tools trained on datasets vulnerable to human biases, operational constraints, strategic framing, and deliberate adversarial manipulation.

Moreover, as highlighted by Galdorisi and Tangredi (2024), AI technology is no longer exclusive to major powers or futuristic scenarios. The dual-use character of AI, coupled with its widespread open-source accessibility, accelerates its adoption by diverse actors seeking geopolitical advantage (Pandya, 2019). AI is already employed in mis- and disinformation campaigns aimed at destabilizing democracies, and its integration with commercially available drones produces cost-effective autonomous weapons. Guilong Yan (2020) further emphasizes AI's transformative role in reshaping the character of hybrid warfare by intensifying its inherent features - synergy, ambiguity, asymmetry, disruption, and psychological manipulation. AI enables hostile actors to operate simultaneously across military, political, economic, civil, and informational domains. Consequently, distinctions between war and peace, civilian and combatant, truth and deception become increasingly blurred. AI-

powered tools amplify the scope, velocity, and impact of adversarial actions, creating profound and persistent challenges.

The concept of dual-use technologies can be interpreted through multiple lenses; however, for the purposes of this article, the analysis will focus on two specific frameworks, excluding, for instance, interpretations of dual-use as good vs. bad. First, it refers to technologies that can serve both military and civilian (non-military) purposes (Miller, 2018:14; Vaynman & Volpe, 2023). Second, it includes technologies initially developed for civilian use but easily repurposed or modified for military applications. This second framework is particularly relevant because the reverse process, adapting military technologies for civilian use, is often more complex and limited. Military systems are typically designed for specific operational contexts, involve classified components, and are governed by strict security protocols. These factors can make their transition to civilian markets impractical, costly, or legally restricted. However, these definitions are not mutually exclusive; in practice, many technologies meet both criteria, reflecting the thin boundaries between civilian and defense innovation. To further clarify this dual-use nature, Vaynman and Volpe (2023) introduce two key analytical dimensions: distinguishability and integration. Distinguishability refers to how easily one can differentiate a technology's civilian and military applications. While some systems, like battleships, are clearly distinct from commercial cargo vessels, others, such as drones, often appear and function similarly in both contexts. Integration, on the other hand, concerns how extensive technology is present in both the civilian dynamics and military operations. Some technologies, like long-range rockets, are used narrowly for strategic or space-related missions. Others are widely used in both commercial and military domains, increasing the complexity and risk associated with inspections or regulatory oversight (Vaynman &Volpe, 2023). Applied to AI, this framework reveals that AI has low distinguishability, as many systems (such as image recognition, language processing, or autonomous navigation) can be used in both civilian and military contexts with minimal modification. Its high integration means that AI is not confined to specialized defense systems but is widely embedded in both military infrastructure and civilian sectors (ranging from healthcare and finance to logistics and communications). This situation makes regulatory oversight complex, as any restriction on military AI use may inadvertently affect essential civilian applications.

Furthermore, the situation becomes even more complex when AI systems are developed by private companies. Although primarily intended for commercial use, these systems often possess architecture and capabilities that can be readily adapted for military purposes (Galdorisi & Tangredi, 2024:11). One major point of contention involves exactly the role of private companies developing AI technologies. While some AI systems, such as those trained on openly available satellite datasets for geospatial intelligence analysis can be adapted for military use, others are limited by the nature of the data they are trained on. Commercial datasets may be suitable for civilian applications but often lack the specificity, sensitivity, and strategic relevance required for defense contexts. Military-grade AI systems demand access to classified or highly specialized datasets that governments are typically unwilling to share, especially with private actors or across national borders. And nevertheless, even when such data is available, it remains inherently past-oriented (Borchert *et al.*, 2024:5-6). Thus, it creates a barrier in translating commercially developed AI into effective military tools, and the involvement of private actors also raises issues of control, accountability, and access to sensitive capabilities beyond state oversight.

In addition, the dual-use nature of AI can go easily beyond the original intentions of their developers and can potentially be corrupted. AI technology can fail when repurposed for military applications if not properly conceptualized and implemented. If originally intended for civilian use, such technology adheres to specific rules and is trained on data aligned with non-military needs. When it is adapted for military purposes, the underlying civilian-oriented data used for training may prove inadequate, leading to operational and drastic failures (Borchert *et al*, 2024). In these cases, the failure of the technology is not only a result of its unsuitability for military use, but also a consequence of the original developers' failure to anticipate and address these dual-use challenges. As a result, technology is misapplied in ways that undermine its original purpose and effectiveness.

Moreover, a particularly problematic scenario arises when a state, lacking the resources or capacity to develop its own technology, relies on external, proxy, or third-party sources to acquire it. Such a source, either a foreign company or a government, may then repurpose the technology that was for military use or manipulate its civilian application to advance its strategic objectives. This situation poses a significant risk because

technology can be used in ways that go beyond the original intent of the user, turning it into a Trojan horse. If the technology acquired is intended for military purposes from the outset, the stakes are even higher, as it becomes a national security issue and a significant risk (and there is no guarantee how or when it will be used to benefit those who control it, making it potentially a high-stakes gamble). Another critical risk emerges when dual-use technology is compromised by external actors who modify or hack it without the knowledge or consent of the original developers or current users, posing a significant security risk. AI, with its opaque algorithms and specialized training data, is an excellent example. Malicious actors could infiltrate the system, manipulate its functions, or deliberately cause it to fail. This represents a distortion of technology's intended purpose, leading to potential misuse and significant vulnerabilities. In any context, AI systems could be corrupted if the data they are trained on is flawed (biased) or intentionally poisoned by adversaries. Additionally, AI systems can be exploited by targeting vulnerabilities in their "thinking" processes, like cognitive hacks that resemble cyberattacks on computer software (Scharre, 2023).

These examples illustrate that the dual-use character of artificial intelligence entails not only operational and regulatory complexities, but also ethical and strategic implications. While the potential benefits of AI, when properly designed, implemented, and governed, are clear and widely acknowledged, this ideal is not always reflected in practice. In many cases, AI technologies are deployed without sufficient oversight, ethical safeguards, or contextual alignment, often driven by the desire to secure a first-mover advantage (Johnson, 2023:12), which can lead to unintended consequences and systemic vulnerabilities.

3. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF TOPIC-RELEVANT TREND ANALYSIS

Over the next decade, and even within the next five years, AI's role is expected to expand significantly among major powers. Key trends driving this expansion include the development of autonomous weapons systems and swarm technologies. They are increasingly designed to operate with minimal human intervention, enhancing their speed, mobility, and operational flexibility (Fox, 2024). Notably, this includes systems capable of autonomously selecting and engaging targets without direct human oversight,

as well as those designed to coordinate attacks in a distributed, self-organizing manner. Such an example can be seen highlighted in a UN report on the conflict in Libya, where autonomous drones were used to hunt down retreating fighters, reportedly operating without requiring data connectivity between the operator and the munition. This effectively demonstrated a "fire, forget, and find" capability, in which the system could independently locate and engage targets after launch (United Nations Security Council, 2021:17). The deployment of such unmanned combat aerial vehicles, along with smaller drones used for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, exemplifies the growing autonomy of military systems and the erosion of direct human control in life-and-death decisions. These developments put pressure on the need for human oversight, accountability and international humanitarian law.

Another key trend is the integration of AI-enabled intelligence and decision-support systems, which militaries are increasingly employing to process vast amounts of data for surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (Simpson et al. 2025). These systems excel at pattern recognition across images, signals, and even social media, enhancing threat detection capabilities. Commanders are beginning to rely on AI tools for wargaming scenarios and operational planning (Ong, 2021). Within the next five years, such decision-support systems may become routine, potentially accelerating the pace of warfare, though not without risks of error. Looking ahead, AI could be embedded into command-and-control networks, enabling real-time coordination across land, air, sea, cyber, and space domains with unprecedented speed and integration.

Another major emerging trend is the growing role of AI in enabling information warfare and intensifying hybrid threats. AI is rapidly becoming a core component of hybrid operations, particularly through its use in generating and amplifying deceptive content. Tools such as deepfakes, generative media, and synthetic audio and video can fabricate highly believable narratives, simulate credible individuals, and manufacture the illusion of public consensus (Mazzucchi, 2022). Beyond spreading mis/ disinformation, these technologies can construct persuasive but false statements, manipulate perception, and erode trust in information ecosystems, all with minimal human intervention.

AI is becoming a powerful tool in the cyber domain, capable of identifying vulnerabilities,

automating attacks, and adapting offensive operations in real time. Offensive AI-based cyber instruments are becoming increasingly widespread, highlighting their dual-use nature as they can be developed for legitimate cybersecurity purposes but easily repurposed. This dual-use potential significantly amplifies the risks in hybrid conflict scenarios, as both state and non-state actors can exploit these tools to disrupt systems and manipulate digital environments.

Furthermore, the "democratization" of AI represents a significant shift from historical patterns of technological development, where innovation was largely driven and controlled by military institutions (Black *et al.*, 2024:3). Today, advances in AI are primarily led by the commercial sector, making the technology widely accessible and rapidly diffused across the globe. As a result, AI is no longer the exclusive domain of superpowers; even smaller states and non-state actors can access and deploy advanced AI tools.

These trends highlight also urgent ethical and regulatory challenges. While institutions like the EU Parliament advocate banning fully autonomous lethal systems, strategic competition continues to drive development. Regulatory efforts lag behind, in part because AI is intangible, dual-use, and difficult to classify. No binding global treaty exists, and recent initiatives, such as the U.S. political declaration and the Dutch summit on responsible military AI (2023), signal progress, but global consensus remains elusive.

Accountability is another concern, as opaque algorithms complicate legal responsibility in cases of civilian harm (Csernatoni, 2024). Ensuring AI compliance with international humanitarian law is both a technical and ethical challenge, especially given potential bias in training data. While Western militaries are adopting ethical principles, enforcement is inconsistent.

AI can provide faster decision-making and enhanced capabilities, but it introduces risks. Technically, AI systems are prone to errors such as target misidentification, adversarial manipulation, data poisoning, and supply chain vulnerabilities, raising serious concerns about reliability in combat scenarios. Operationally, autonomous systems can behave unpredictably, and their opaque decision-making may lead to either overreliance or mistrust. Risks like automation bias and accelerated conflict tempo pose challenges for command structures and human oversight. Strategically, it accelerates the arms race dynamics, erodes deterrence stability, and increases the risk of proliferation to rogue actors or non-state groups. Without robust

governance, human control, resilience frameworks and confidence-building measures, military AI could become a major driver of global instability.

Beyond dominant trends, several weak signals can be identified, like AI-augmented wargaming and strategic planning (with early experiments showing promise in simulating adversary behavior and generating novel tactics). Non-state actors, including militias and criminal networks, have begun experimenting with AI tools like deepfakes and autonomous drones. While isolated now, their growing access to open-source AI could pose new threats.

Several low-probability but high-impact wild cards can also be examined. One possibility is accidental escalation, where an AI defense or early-warning system misinterprets an event (for example as a hostile act) triggering unintended military conflict. Such an incident could provoke international backlash. Another wild card is a breakthrough toward advanced AI or Artificial General Intelligence. A sudden leap in capabilities could grant a single actor overwhelming strategic advantage, destabilizing global power balances and igniting an arms race (or conversely, forcing cooperation through deterrence).

A third situation involves a non-state actor acquiring AI super-weapons. Though currently unlikely due to technical barriers, such a case becomes more plausible if the actor acquires commercially available, civilian AI systems and repurposes them using internal expertise and resources. Such a case would allow for the development of powerful tools that rival state capabilities.

4. FIVE POSSIBLE RISK SCENARIOS

To explore the evolving security implications of AI's dual-use nature, this section employs as a methods scenario building to examine several potential futures. Drawing on the trend analysis, these following scenarios illustrate how AI can amplify hybrid threats, expose strategic vulnerabilities, and challenge existing regulatory frameworks. While speculative in nature, each scenario is grounded in observable developments and serves to anticipate potential risks, stress-test assumptions, and inform future policy.

The first scenario proposes a commercial AI-based facial recognition system, originally developed for smart city infrastructure, is repurposed by a state actor for surveillance in contested territories. The technology, embedded in civilian CCTV networks, is linked to a centralized

military command structure that uses it to identify and detain political dissidents and perceived insurgents. The system's civilian origins obscure its militarized application, evading international scrutiny. This scenario underlines the challenge of low distinguishability in dual-use AI, as well as the risks of civilian infrastructure being militarized covertly. It points out how dual-use AI can facilitate hybrid authoritarian strategies that blend domestic control with strategic denial. It also raises concerns about accountability and verification mechanisms in export control regimes.

The second scenario takes place during a regional border standoff, where an autonomous loitering munition misidentifies a surveillance drone as a hostile asset and engages it without human oversight. The incident triggers a retaliatory cyberattack from the opposing state. Due to algorithmic opacity and communication delays, human commanders are unable to confirm the chain of events before escalation occurs. What this scenario points to is the strategic risk of automated decision-making in crisis situations, particularly where human oversight is disregarded. It underscores the necessity for meaningful human control, and the development of autonomous engagement norms to prevent unintentional conflict escalation. It also reveals the tempo mismatch between AI systems and diplomatic channels in high-stakes settings.

Third, in the scenario a mid-level power contracts a private foreign vendor to develop an AI-enabled logistics system for national critical infrastructure. The vendor includes hidden surveillance functions in the software, allowing a rival state to map and eventually disrupt key military supply routes during a regional conflict. The embedded system is activated remotely during a hybrid campaign. In this case, it can be demonstrated the vulnerability of AI supply chains, especially where foreign-developed systems are integrated into dual-use national infrastructure. It highlights the need for technological due diligence, source auditing, and the creation of AI integrity verification mechanisms to prevent adversarial manipulation of embedded civilian technologies.

The fourth scenario can take the form of a non-state actor that adapts open-source AI navigation code, originally designed for agricultural drones, into a low-cost swarm system targeting energy infrastructure. The attack demonstrates unexpected effectiveness, inspiring similar efforts by other groups. The proliferation of easily accessible dual-use AI destabilizes deterrence dynamics and overwhelms conventional defense mechanisms.

From this scenario is underlined the democratization of AI-based warfare through open-source tools, challenging traditional state monopolies on high-end technologies. It emphasizes the risks of unregulated dual-use code dissemination and necessitates the development of norms for open-source AI governance to mitigate proliferation risks.

In the fifth scenario, and the last, an AI-enabled port management system, implemented to optimize maritime logistics, is compromised via software vulnerability inserted by a foreign subcontractor. During a geopolitical crisis, this vulnerability is activated: cargo ships are misclassified, coast guard vessels are deprioritized, and false manifests enable the insertion of surveillance devices into critical maritime infrastructure. This scenario underscores the hybrid risks of AI integration in maritime infrastructure, particularly where civilian logistics systems intersect with naval operations. It raises concerns over infrastructure sabotage, supply chain infiltration, and the blurring of civil-military boundaries. It also highlights the urgent need for AI security protocols in smart port systems and civil-military resilience planning in the maritime domain.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study has looked in the dual-use nature of artificial intelligence and its implications for contemporary dynamics, with particular attention to the risks posed by hybrid threats, data vulnerabilities, and civil–military convergence. Through an integrated approach that combined literature review, trend analysis and scenario development, the research has shown that AI, while offering enhanced operational capabilities, simultaneously generates complex ethical dilemmas and strategic vulnerabilities. The scenarios presented illustrate how AI can be repurposed, manipulated, or misused in ways that destabilize both technological ecosystems and geopolitical environments.

A central insight that can be seen is the role of data, not merely as an input for AI functionality, but as a contested space. The integrity, control, and resilience of overall data will increasingly define the effectiveness and security of AI applications. When the data that trains and drives AI systems is vulnerable to manipulation, corruption, or theft, AI becomes not a strategic advantage, but a liability. The militarization of AI and its integration into critical infrastructure, particularly when combined with supply chain insecurities and open-source

diffusion, create an environment in which adversarial actors can exploit latent weaknesses far below the traditional thresholds of warfare.

Considering these findings, a number of key policy directions must be considered. First, there is a pressing need to strengthen the resilience of AI systems through robust data governance, secure and transparent supply chains, and ongoing testing for algorithmic integrity. Governments and institutions must develop capabilities for auditing, verifying, and stress-testing AI tools that operate in critical or dual-use contexts.

Second, ethical frameworks must move beyond voluntary principles and be embedded into legal, operational, and technical protocols. These frameworks should address not only the intended use of AI systems but also their potential misuse, ensuring that accountability mechanisms are preserved even as autonomy increases.

Furthermore, anticipatory governance must be prioritized through the integration of foresight practices into policy development. This includes funding scenario-based strategic planning, establishing early-warning mechanisms for emerging AI threats, and institutionalizing cross-sector dialogue between civilian innovators, military planners, and ethicists. Regulation should not aim to stifle innovation but rather to ensure that innovation does not outpace responsibility.

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WHAT ABOUT THE TRANSITION FROM DIGITAL ERA TO GUTENBERG GALAXY?

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Abstract: *The cultural turn the humanity is experiencing by consuming information using internet of things has profound influences on people's mind. The patterns of behavior since smartphones have become an omnipresent device are investigated by social scientists, questioning issues like virtual identities or cyber-psychology, in order to determine fundamental changes people manifest in the new digital era. In this article we aim to discuss not the changes the new media of communication determine, but to explore the ideas highlighted by theorists of communication when speaking about major changes the Gutenberg galaxy has produced and try to figure out a strategy to maintain the benefits of that era for the digital natives. How pupils should be educated in order to cultivate certain behaviors and abilities which might be in danger in the current contexts of overconsumption of digital content? To answer that question, we aim to discuss the major patterns of behavior the Gutenberg era has produced and how to uphold and prevent the degradation of those valuable models.*

Keywords: *Gutenberg galaxy; digital era; virtual identities; patterns of behavior*

1. INTRODUCTION

The defining feature of the Gutenberg Galaxy is the making of the typographic man. The above affirmation was expressed by Marshall McLuhan in his book published in 1962. Starting from the ideas presented in his book, we intend to revisit the concepts proposed by the author when describing the effects the printing press had on culture and on human consciousness in order to compare them with the apparent specificities of the electronic/digital age.

It is assumed that the typographic man or the Gutenberg man had a certain type of consciousness as he used preponderant written words and texts, while the new electronic era is producing a different kind of perception of reality as it has brought into the foreground the visual, the images, replacing the words as main signs for communication with the images.

McLuhan identified four historical epochs when referring to preponderant means of communication: oral-tribe culture, manuscript culture, Gutenberg galaxy, and electronic age. Taking as indicators of the big social changes the main means of communication, McLuhan (1997) discusses as well the cultural turns the humanity has experienced since the electronic era has started to manifest on the global scene. The author highlights that the humanity has been changing the doors of perception of reality by changing the predominant means of communication.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned aspects, we assume that the definitional characteristic of the new era rests on the hypertrophy of the visual, as code of communications, placing words (written or spoken) on an inferior position. The consequences of that transposition have been discussed by diverse specialists, yet the implications for the world society are not fully understood or anticipated. We believe that it would be important that the academic world to seriously reflect upon educating young generations, the digital natives, taking into the consideration the achievements of the Gutenberg galaxy. As the new media of communication has changed dramatically since cinema entered on the social scene or since the common use of smartphones occurred in the late 2010s, the features of the written culture are less and less present as "the ubiquity of smartphones" (Metcalf 2021) becomes the new feature of the communicational environment.

For instance, the recent released in Romania of the legal interdiction (MEC, 2025) for using smartphones in schools, during the class hours, represents an indicator that the devices generate behaviors that severely interfere with the traditional educational models, whether we speak about distracting the attention of pupils from classes or about the subtle influences not yet detected when speaking about mental or cognitive maps of the pupils.

In this article we assume that the major difference between previous era of communication and the current digital environment consists in the differentiation between the culture of words and the culture of images, be them images in motion, and we intend to reveal some elements highlighted by scholars when trying to comprehend the major changes that have been produced by the prevalent means of communications on human consciousness.

2. THE CULTURE OF WORDS AND THE CULTURE OF THE IMAGES

The culture of words and the culture of the visual/the image are the themes the theorists of communications discuss and analyze when trying to understand the profound implications of such a change. By using words as prevalent signs of significance, the value of national languages increased during the Gutenberg era.

The changes from an era to another, specifically from the oral and the manuscript culture to the typographic culture, was not an easy process, and even understanding the changes was a difficult enterprise. McLuhan (1962:11) reveals, for instance, that even

the map was a novelty in the sixteenth century […] Columbus had been a cartographer before he was a navigator […] The map brings forward at once a principal theme of King Lear, namely the isolation of the visual sense as a kind of blindness.

What kind of blindness the visual culture might have involved? McLuhan (1962:17) captures the change writing that

by 1709, Bishop Berkeley in his *New Theory of Vision* was denouncing the absurdity of Newtonian visual space as a mere abstract illusion severed from the sense of touch. (McLuhan, 1962:17)

Saying that the "medium is the message", McLuhan (1997) not necessarily simplified understanding the changes or his concept of the one-dimensional man. By citing Bertrand Russell, who wrote in 1925 *ABC of Relativity*, the author suggests that

what is demanded is a change in our imaginative picture of the world... The same sort of change was demanded by Copernicus, when he thought that the earth is not stationary . . . To us now there is no difficulty in this idea, because we learned it before our mental habits had become fixed. Einstein's ideas, similarly, will seem easier to generations

which grow up with them; but for us a certain effort of imaginative reconstruction is unavoidable. (McLuhan, 1962:41)

McLuhan tried to explain why print culture confers on man a language of thought which leaves him quite unready to face the language of his own electro-magnetic technology. The idea the author upholds, that schizophrenia may be a necessary consequence of literacy or the fact that the basic aspect of any literate audience is its profound acceptance of a passive consumer role in the presence of book or film are just a few observations related to typographic personality.

The observations McLuhan makes seems random ones, without using certain categories for classification. A few examples show that diverse areas of human experience are involved:

The invention of the alphabet...reduced the use of all the senses at once, which is oral speech, to a merely visual code.

The alphabet is an aggressive and militant absorber and transformer of cultures.

The discovery that the representation of *natural appearances* is quite abnormal and also quite imperceptible as such to non-literate peoples, has created some disturbance of mind nowadays. That is to say, single plan lineal, visual, and sequential codification of experience is quite conventional and limited. (McLuhan, 1962: 45-53)

The entire spectrum of the transformations the digital era determine is hard to anticipate, yet we may presume that the visual code will be the prevalent code for communication. Regarding the perception of reality, when speaking about images as signs, the idea that there is no obvious cultural correlation between visual and reality as it happens in the case of the correlation that exists between words and reality may produce the false impression of an immediate access to truths. The fake idea that the visual represents the reality and not a language might confuse the audience who might not interpret that the content may still be the human psyche. When we learn to speak, we learn much more than simple words, notices Hartley (1999). Speaking also involves selection and organization of experiences. The same happens to images in motions. The movies hardly respect the principles of objectivity, wrote Bela (1957). The order of the images involves a composition, even when the director's desire is just to be clear and intelligible. What is to be seen in movies? What is to be seen, replies Bela (1957) existed before the

montage was made, even before the images were selected. The director photographs the reality, but the meaning results from montage. Neutrality is impossible. When the spectator recognizes himself on the screen then the star is born, evokes Barna (1972). In movies you cannot find reality, but realities, wrote Bazin (1969). Every era has its own realism and cinema just leaves the impression that it is a language that everybody understands, but it's not true. Cinema is an art similar to literature whose raw material is a preexisting and autonomous reality. It's about the language of objects, which is inherently elusive. There are many situations when the director thought that he had expressed an idea perfectly clear, without possibilities for digression, but the spectator might find a lot of concrete details, others than those selected by the stage director. The thinking of concrete is preferred to the detriment of the abstract thinking. Bazin (1969) asks the question what the public see? And noticed that the content of the images was not the same for the stage director and for the spectator. The difference most of the time favours the concrete to the detriment of the abstract and the paradox of the cinema is that it expresses the abstract ideas by using the very concrete representation of reality. And that's its power and its perdition. Bazin (1969) signalized that under the shield of the innate realism of images an entire system of abstractions fraudulently sneaks. Apparently, the events are cropped according to a natural anatomy of nature, but actually the reality is subordinated in integrality to the meaning of the actions and is transformed without signaling into a series of abstract marks.

The isolated images may represent the nature, but the montage may reveal the truth or the lie. The images in motion have a great influence at emotional level (Giovannini, 1989). The public has the tendency, for instance, to vote/support the candidate for emotional reasons, even if they not agree with his views.

Speaking about the humanist culture, Abraham Moles (1977) considered that humanity experienced a stage during its evolution when a doctrine of knowledge was created. The doctrine assumed the existence of major themes for thought contrasting to those of minor importance.

The humanist culture had proposed a hierarchy, an order for the concepts, involving the existence of some general integrating ones. One's perception of reality was "educated" to make certain connections with a network of concepts, to make references to a cultural screen having predefined routes. The cultural texture was composed of main ideas/routes, secondary, tertiary...and so on. The cognitive map was one constructed by coherent notions and concepts, a network of important thoughts, having certain themes functioning like intersections. The educated screen of knowledge on which the new perceptions were projected had the design of a canvas or of a spider web.

The question would be now how the mantal map is configured in the digital age? To have a clue about its design, we have searched for specialists, like Abraham Moles (1977), who wrote about the visual culture. He used the phrase 'mosaic culture' in order to describe the mental map of a person living in a visual environment. He evokes that the cognitive map is not organized in a similar way the culture of words organizes. In a mosaic one, the world is discovered by chance, using the proximity relations between things or events. Replacing the words with the images, people perceive reality by juxtaposing things, objects, colors etc. The challenge signaled by scholars (Berger 1978) would be the images to be kept under the explanatory power of the words, because the autonomy of the human beings from nature was permitted by literacy and it started with the word usage. The progress of humanity was made possible by the humanist culture, by the language, the alphabet, the words, and the cognitive map they produced. The images communicate to senses. The variability of the features of things speaks to senses, while the absence of things affords thinking. Rene Berger (1978) defined the new cultural media the "kinetic amalgam". The world of representations is full of signs and the universe becomes the Great Amalgam: that's the world of images, the new words.

Berger (1978) wrote about the mutation of the signs and about the new conceptions of time and space, the essential concepts of the consciousness. The great cultural mutation generated by bringing the images at the center of social life and by replacing the words as main codes of communication modified the general feeling that the reality had an essence, visible or invisible, exact or approximate, true or apparent and the belief that in a way or another the reality could be identified and defined.

Yet in the digital age we discover that visible are the things which deserve to be seen. To identify the visible items involves as well to qualify them.

The hypertrophy of the images to the detriment of words favors the sensitivity to the detriment of the intellect and spontaneity to the detriment of

critical thinking. The image is meant to be seen, not to be understood. The image is not an allegory to provide food for thought, but a signifier which can make you happy or sad, having no other consequence. Having no significance, the signifier degrades until becomes just a signal for sensitivity.

It's true, the excess of rationality has generated the excess of irrationality and of affectivism. Attracted by the movements of images, people leave mostly of the time outside them. The interiority needs words, meditation and dialogue. Knowledge has evolved during time as long as the verbal significant was produced, by abstraction and generalization. Intellectual and theoretical significances were not supposed to be seen, the abstract thinking was placed beyond the sensitive appearances of things and phenomena.

For instance, when speaking about images in motion, the movie language, it seems that its language definitively satisfies people's obsession for realism. Because the movie language looks like concrete reality, it benefits by the favorable bias of objectivity. Other arts cannot hide the codes used to communicate (words, shapes, sounds) in order to capture understanding and the sensitivity. For instance, TV shows are mainly seen, but less heard. The demonstrations or the allegations generate impressions, rather than thoughts. At the TV debates the public mainly react saying that a certain person inspires or not confidence and the feedback is less expressed by saying that the argument is or not convincing. The images are suggestive, less logical. For instance, the assumed objectivity of a photography provides the message with credibility, but a painting has no such an attribute. The photography benefits from a transfer of reality and movies seems to be the perfection of that transfer.

The visual culture benefits as well by the optimist perspective that the new cultural climate has recovered the faculties lost during Gutenberg period. Communicating preponderantly using words, notions or abstract concepts, peoples lost the feeling of proximate reality. The new digital era modified the perception of reality and the structure of the human consciousness has been tribalized.

Because of the printing materials, especially books and press, it was assumed that the schism between though and action, reason and sensibility, visual and audited was institutionalized.

Knowledge was perceived in terms of positivity, fragmentary, segmented, and forged to a certain rhythm unspecific for real life experience and living. As words constructed the one-dimensional man, the images were believed to

reconstruct the multi-dimensional man. It was assumed that the Gutenberg technologies produced the fragmentation of human personality and the knowledge produced the analytical man, a cold and a detached personality. By naming, the objects were extracted from nature's anonymity and placed as objects to be observed by man. By providing the possibility to refer to an absent reality, to an invisible one, the words inaugurated the autonomy of the interior life from the exterior one. The anthropomorphism was no longer perceived as an isolating screen, but the greatest way to the essence of reality (Berger 1978).

The visual culture is a non-conceptual one, more concrete and more accessible than the notional communication. The images possess ambiguity and give no explanation, yet the public searches for meanings in images, that's why the commentaries are essential. When communicating through images the mind follows the eyes and not the eyes follow the mind like in everyday life situations.

The photographic image represents the zero level of intelligibility, an infrasemantic level and less meaningful. The level of denotation is relevant anyway as it upholds the second level of interpretation, the connotation. (Barthes 2007)

The subjectivity of the events is glorified within the visual culture. Every carving of events is determined by the a priori conception of the "director" and the worldview of the photographer becomes the object of reality in itself. It involves not only a dramatic choice, affective or ethical, but a taking of a position towards the reality.

What exactly drives the photographer in choosing the significant images? It is an option taken in that moment or there is a program derived from an artistic conception? Bauret (1997) believes that the second option represents the honest one as long as the public becomes aware about the selection and the criteria that reflects the photographer's preferences.

In order to express the cultural differences between people living in different countries, McLuhan (1962: 19) notices that "whereas for Europeans, in general, *seeing is believing*, for rural Africans reality seems to reside far more in what is heard and what is said."

3. FAKE-NEWS AND THE POST-TRUTH SOCIETY THE DIGITAL AGE

The transformation of the culture of words into the visual culture meant as well losing the obsession and the preoccupation with the reality. The truth of an image was no longer contested. The

scientific truths were less prone to be express visually. The images, the chemical structure of elements, for instance, were considered the objective views of a micro reality. As the images satisfied the need for objectivity, we presume people lost interest in imagining the invisible truth.

It is possible that the truth decays the society is experiencing nowadays to be the consequence of visual communication. The truth that cannot be photographed, the invisible truth, has no place within an universe of physical representations. The fake-news phenomenon and the number of studies published in order to teach the audience to identify the disinformation may be the symptom for the disinterest of the general public in the truth. If the truth is hidden by the written text, the public who no longer has patience to read texts may opt to ignore the reality. We assume that the visual and the digital culture deeply transformed the knowledge interest of people. The fact that the blogs have become so dizzyingly infinite may have as a consequence the undermining of our sense of what is true and what is false, what is real and what is imaginary. (Keen 2007:5) The post-truth society or the truth decay have become realities as the search for objectivity is no longer an important issue in people's life.

The fake-news phenomenon might be in the interest of scholars, but not for the majority of people. The majority of people might be interested in expressing their personal subjectivity or consuming information disrespectful to its truth value. Keen (2007:5-7) notices that children can't tell the difference between credible news presented by objective professional journalists and what they read on blogs.

> For these Generation Y Utopians, every posting is just another person's version of the truth; every fiction is just another person's version of the facts. The New York Times reports that 50% of all bloggers blog for the sole purpose of reporting and sharing experiences about their personal lives. The tagline for YouTube is *Broadcast Yourself.*

The cultural shift towards millions of subjectivities undermines the very interest in knowing the truth, the interest in the objective reality or in the scientific truths. Having in mind the conspiracy theories, even scientific truths are relativized and transformed in "relative truths". The paradox that reality exists as long as one perceives it reverse the very essence of knowledge: the observer studies objectively the reality. Within the new cultural environment, the observer becomes in fact the observed object. The observer becomes the selfish observer.

Writing about the cult of the amateur, Keen (2007) highlights the superficiality of the people, who are no longer preoccupied in seriously analyzing realities. The new cultural environment it's about subjectivities, that's why Keen recommends: "let's not be remembered for replacing movies, music, and books with YOU!" (Keen 2007:204) As long as the aggregated behaviors generates the social world, the social becomes mere subjectivities. The same remark makes McBrayer ,

> there's no point in producing misinformation unless there are people to consume it…We regularly consume misinformation for two reasons. Sometimes we don't really want the truth. Other times we want the truth, but the costs of getting it are too high…our participation in the information market is more like a sport than a science: we don't get into the game to carefully figure out what's true (McBrayer, 2021:40-41)

4. A NO TO MORE DIGITALISATION OF EDUCATION

Nowadays the recommendation for reading an article often refers to time necessary to read the text: the shorter the time, the better. When speaking about education, it's not only about processing the content, yet it is about patience. Without training and discipline, children are unlikely to have patience in reading and interpreting texts, articles or books, as long as they are used to instant consummation of information, as internet provides.

The second aspect, the more they consume online information, the higher the visual content. "Consuming" less information transmitted through words and more information transmitted through images the effort required for reading and understanding the content transmitted through books most probably will raise. The balance between the two codes of communication should be seriously analyzed in order models of teaching to be designed for implementing learning by reading and writing.

To establish as goals for the educator's/ teacher's community to be assertive with the new digital generations and to make effort to accommodate teaching methods to the new digital content might not be the best way to maintain the achievements the humanity got during history. "We need to find a way to balance the best of the digital future without destroying the institutions of the past." (Keen, 2007:185)

Even the digital natives might be resilient in keeping their patterns of consuming information, we believe that it would be extremely dangerous that the academic and teacher's communities not to intervene. Even if the behavior of reading books might seem obsolete and boring for the new generations, the teacher's community should find ways in order promote leaning by reading and writing, by using mainly words and not images instead.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We believe that the new social realities of the digital natives have not yet manifested the full spectrum of effects generated by the new devices and the new means of communication. The differences between different generations might be easy to be observed. The new paths the digital world invite us to open are brand new. Having no maps for the uncertain digital future, we analyzed in this article the idea of restoring the old cognitive maps in order to scrutinize the future. Instead of running too fast ahead, it might be important to take a look at history and at the evolution stages of humanity, especially when speaking about great changes and achievements that marked different eras of development. As a consequence of the mediated reality by the movies, life seems a pretext for the spectacle. The people's action and words seem to have importance as long as they are transformed and represented on photography… it seems that flesh and blood have less value than the recorded realities (Aristarco 1992).

Understanding the Gutenberg era as a specific period of time which produced scientific advance and cultural progress, it would be prudent no to lose sight of the cognitive maps the Gutenberg era constructed. We believe it's too risky not to cultivate the values generated by the previous generations, the generations educated in the spirit of humanist culture, and repudiate old learning and educational methods which have as fundament reading and writing: the words. Switching too fast to a world built on images and consuming mainly images in motion, the society might risk its existence since truth no longer is valued adequately. Certain truths cannot be relativized. As the scientific truths have inner value, values the humanity strived to achieve during time, it would be important not to abandon the traditional educational values. Making a reference to a specific film procedure, the travelling back may have different hermeneutics. The progressive expansion of the visual field with different speeds allows the director to express multiple meanings: conclusion, psychological detachment, taking distance from present time, accompanying a character, the impression of solitude, discouragement or, helplessness, and so on. (Agel, 1969)

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FROM TOTALITARIAN LEGACY TO COLLECTIVE SECURITY: A CONSTRUCTIVIST AND CLA-BASED STUDY OF EASTERN NATO COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *In this article, our objective is to conduct a comparative analysis regarding the national security laws in Romania, Poland and Lithuania, countries that, in the past, had totalitarian regimes in place. Currently, all these countries are members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The purpose of this article is to examine both the legislative convergences and divergences, emphasizing the major impact of the regulatory system on collective security. The study harmoniously combines the perspective of the Copenhagen School and elements of constructivism, in order to provide effective legislative solutions, adapted, in particular, to the new geopolitical circumstances.*

Keywords*: constructivism; intercultural context; CLA-based study; sovereignty; self-determination*

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on the premise that "Security regimes are defined as sets of norms, rules and decision-making procedures" (Krasner, 1983: 2) in the field of security and from the fact that they promote stability in an international system, since cooperating states refrain from expanding conflicts and consider peace as a less costly option (Jervis, 1982:360-362, *apud* Krahman, 2003:7), we can say that a legislative analysis regarding the security field of the states concerned, the historical context and the interactions between them, is more than opportune to exemplify how they achieve a common front against different forms of threat. In the case of Romania, Poland and Lithuania, the experiences of totalitarian regimes have crystallized the normative and institutional responses. Cooperation within NATO and the EU reflects even better the need to understand the convergence of rules and procedures, in a current tense context.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order for a society to really be able to enter the category of those organized and democratically governed, it is mandatory to observe certain basic rules or principles, taken as a unitary whole, which can take concrete forms, depending on the respective stage and the historical conditions of each country (Mihai & Pahonţu, 2009:213).

These authors recall some of the principles that should not be evaded, namely the existence of a solid normative framework to have *sedes materiae,* which would represent the foundation, in the fight against the various threats, regulated by a fundamental law - the Constitution - in which the fundamental rights and freedoms of man and peoples, the equality of rights of all citizens and peoples are provided, with legislative guarantees that these rights and freedoms can be freely expressed and exercised. Another principle lies in the existence of the separation of powers in the state; the legislative power, the executive power, respectively the judicial power.

For historical reasons, the separation of powers in the state appeared as a necessity and as a guarantee against totalitarianism, a regime that distanced us as a state from everything related to Western European values, in which electoral elections were constantly rigged, compared to the fact that there was no option for citizens to vote universally, direct, secret and freely expressed the leader.

Another principle to which the aforementioned authors appeal is the right of citizens to use alternative sources of information, protected by law, and the existence of means of information (mass-media), which manifest themselves freely.

By the free manifestation it must be understood that an organ of information independently exercises the position it adopts, without the state power, in particular, imposing a certain line on the basis of censorship.

In a context in which Romania is developing annually, in which it has begun to define more and more its position within European alliances, such as NATO and the EU, and to collaborate with all the states that are part of these organizations, it is natural that there are interests and influences from other states motivated by the elimination *of the international status quo* that would affect the collaboration between the Romanian state and the other member states.

As a consequence, in the current context, we must implicitly take into account "the new vulnerabilities acquired by developed and democratic societies, based on sophisticated electronic systems, used in almost all areas of social activity, including national security and defense, exposed to new risks, of a modern nature. It is increasingly evident that for both democratic states with open societies and those with authoritarian regimes, information and communication technologies make it almost impossible - and this will be amplified - for the intervention or centralized control of the state over individuals or groups of different natures, including ethnic or religious (Mihai & Pahonțu, 2009:352).

Taking this phrase as a reference, we can admit that it is essential to quickly identify the various threats, so that measures can be taken against them. The measures derive from the existence of a varied legislative framework and through international cooperation between states. Through good cooperation, states contribute to collective security.

Prior to addressing the various doctrinal concepts, we must specify that the Supreme Constitutional Court of Romania has approached, in several decisions, the concept of national security, viewed distinctly from several perspectives. Thus, we intend to specify that by decision no. 455/2018, "The Court held that the term "*national security*" is a plurivalent one and that, from the perspective of art. 53, para. (1) of the Constitution, one can speak of the military, economic, financial, information technology, social security of the country. Also, in the CCR decision. 455/2018, it was found that the security of networks and information systems is a matter of national security, the Court operating again with the notion of securitization, this time in the field of information systems (Popa, 2020).

By CCR Decision no. 872/2010, the Court certifies that the notion of national security is a constitutional concept and that an element of it is the state of balance and economic stability. Thus, it is considered that national security does not refer exclusively to the military situation, but also extends to the social and economic component. In this regard, the exercise of citizens' rights and freedoms, as provided for under Article 53 of the country's fundamental law, may be restricted in exceptional situations. Regarding to the brief introduction, as a preliminary matter, we are going to address the fundamental information in the field of law, national security and communication.

From the point of view of intelligence analysis, conducting a comparative analysis study between the legislations of the different states that had a totalitarian regime is relevant for societal security requires reference to the reference object of securitization.

> While the reference object refers to what is threatened, securitization is the political and discursive process by which an intersubjective agreement is created within the political community on what represents a threat to the reference object, demanding urgent and exceptional measures to remove it (Weaver, 2008:582).

Identifying the elements that can constitute reference objects in the context of societal security requires reviewing the debates that aimed to define them. Thus, we intend to approach within the research different theories, respectively concepts that are the object of our study regarding national and collective security.

The Copenhagen school different theories: (1) Security sectors (multisectoral approach); (2) Regional Security Complex Theory (TCRS); and (3) Securitization theory. In order to explain these concepts, the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSTC) was first proposed by Barry Buzan (1983) in the first edition of his volume *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations.* More recent developments are due to the Copenhagen school, in particular the collaboration between Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (2003). TCRS argues that the actions and motivations of international security actors are deeply rooted at the regional level – the main concerns of the actors are related to the immediate vicinity (proximity/contiguity) of the actor. The security of each actor in the security complex interacts with the security of the other actors. Among the reference works of the researchers

involved in the Copenhagen School is *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, published by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde (1998), probably the most influential work of the school, which synthesizes the most important ideas.

By comparison, in terms of realist theory, security has remained statocentric, focused on military power and military threats involving the use of force (McDonald, 2008:200). Although there have been differences between the multiple variants of realism, the debate on security has remained concerned with the character of relations between states, sharing the perspective that they remain unchanged, and changes – when they occur, occur in repetitive patterns tag (Elman, 2008:16). In the liberalist conception and other theories derived from this vision, the debate on security had as central concerns the maintenance of peace at the international level and the role of international organizations in reducing the conflict, by influencing the behaviors of states (Navarri, 2008:29-43).

From the very beginning, we understand to rally to the point of view of one author, according to which constructivism is a social theory, not a substantial one, which means that it focuses on understanding the relationship between agents (such as states) and structures (such as international norms), rather than on explaining specific models in world politics. Unlike substantive theories such as those that explain why democracies rarely wage war, constructivism examines how common ideas, norms, and beliefs shape the international system. It shares similarities with rational choice theory, which provides a framework for understanding how actors pursue fixed preferences under constraints, but does not define the content of those preferences or constraints.

Constructivism emphasizes the role of human consciousness, collective ideas, and interpretations in shaping material realities. For example, the concept of the balance of power is not an objective truth, but a social construction debated by states. While theory recognizes structural forces, it also allows agency, recognizing that interactions between actors can transform global structures. At its core, constructivism sees the world as a dynamic interaction between common ideas and individual actions, with rules and interpretations that lead to change (Baylis *et al.*, 2020:197).

Alexander Wendt, the one who extended conventional constructivist theory based on liberal premises, asserted that international institutions can reshape the identities and interests of the state.

He argued that debates in international relations have shifted from focusing on human nature to examining how state actions are shaped by "structure" (anarchy and distribution of power), "process" (interaction and learning), and institutions.

In the meantime, the Copenhagen School has extended the concept of security beyond the military dimension, applying it to the social, political, economic and environmental levels. Barry Buzan (1983) identified five key sectors of national security: military, political, economic, social, and environmental, offering a more comprehensive approach than state-centered realism. His studies have placed societal security at the heart of the European agenda, highlighting identity as a primary value for the security of society, while sovereignty remains the central criterion for state security. Buzan and Weaver conceptualized this relationship as a "parallel duality" between the state and society, proposing that concerns about the security of society focus on collective identities rather than just the individual (Buzan, 1997:19-20).

There is no doubt that security, according to the vision of the Copenhagen School (Buzan, 1997:16-17), must be seen in the context of "international security". In the absence of such a vision, we consider that our legislative analysis would remain devoid of purpose and would outline the idea that interstate threats do not represent common objectives. The same author admitted that there are implicit disadvantages of the study of security in several sectors. These disadvantages are represented by the need to mobilize the state for more problems and the raising of the term security to the level of universal good.

In the opinion of the theorists of the Copenhagen School, the security of society is based on the identification of specific types of threats, including migration, horizontal competition, depopulation and vertical competition (Buzan *et al.*, 1998:121-122).

However, this approach is not without criticism. McSweeney challenges the choice of "identity" as the primary value that defines the security of society, suggesting that other elements may also be relevant in this context. In contrast, Nordic theorists, drawing on the traditions of the welfare state in the region, emphasize the importance of transnational protection of interconnected infrastructures (Larsson & Rhinard, 2021:8). In this functionalist approach, the focus shifts from cultural identities to the protection of vital social functions (Rhinard, 2020:23-26).

In the political realm, existential threats are often related to sovereignty, the fundamental principle of the state. Sovereignty can be threatened by forces that challenge the legitimacy, recognition, or governance of the state. Buzan argues that the main objective of society's security is the protection of collective identities that can function independently of the state, such as nations or religions. These identities are influenced by both internal and external developments, making existential threats more difficult to identify. For example, migrants or rival identities can become subjects of securitization, perceived as threats depending on the type of society (closed or open to change).

The next section will explore the concept of sovereignty from a legal perspective, especially in the context of public international law, and will address other aspects of Security, viewed from a transdisciplinary dimension.

From a legal point of view, a first concept that we must bring to the fore is that of sovereignty (Geamănu, 1967:37). Sovereignty

> is currently the fundamental concept of international law, given that international law is expression of the agreement made between sovereign states (the main element on which it is built today the state and international organization). Sovereignty is internal (supremacy) and external (independence) (Năstase *et al.*, 2012:53).

From this concept, several principles emerge in a very clear manner. A first principle is that of self-determination, consisting in the right of peoples to determine their own fate. It has its origin in the United Nations Declaration of 1970, which affirms the equality of peoples, respectively the right to determine their own fate. Thus, in the context of our research topic, the people are the only ones in a position to determine their own fate, without there being other subjects of international law. Therefore, according to the above-mentioned declaration, "all peoples have the right to decide their political status, in complete freedom and without interference from outside".

We are obliged to emphasize that the principle of self-determination should not be confused with the principle of non-interference in internal affairs (non-interference). Inspired by the

> Calvo, Drago Doctrines, 1866 and 1902, it represents the obligation of states not to intervene in matters that fall within the national competence of a state (Năstase *et al.*, 2012:55).

It emphasizes, in an even more eloquent manner, the fact that any intervention, be it military, political, economic or cultural, is inadmissible.

In this context, we believe that the principle enshrined in Article 2 (2) of the UN Charter, Article 29 of the Vienna Convention, which consists in the fulfillment in good faith of international obligations (*pacta sunt servanda) should be implicitly* highlighted. Therefore, it is an obligation, without a trace of subterfuge, for states to resort to legal norms and good conduct, so that there are no violations of the provisions enshrined in the law.

Another concept to which we intend to refer is freedom of expression, as it is regulated in the light of the provisions of Article 53 of the Constitution and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This concept is found not only in the fundamental law of our country, but also in the legislations of the states under analysis. Indeed, an essential condition for democracy and for any state to develop, political pluralism is, without a doubt, a *sine qua non condition.* The question that arises is whether, however, free speech, which, Of course, it includes freedom of opinion and the freedom to receive or communicate information, it is likely to be circumvented by normative acts and in what contexts.

We consider that free expression is used as a vital condition for progress, however, the authorities must intervene exclusively in the situation in which the desire to restore the involution is found. The finding is a natural one, because the right to expression is not absolute, but relative. That is why the authors of the European Convention on Human Rights added to Article 10 a derogatory clause in paragraph 2 of the text, which allows interference by state authorities with cumulative compliance with three conditions: (1) the interference must be provided for by law, (2) the interference must be aimed at one of the express legitimate purposes mentioned in Article 10 (national security, territorial integrity or public security, the defense of public order and the prevention of crime, the disclosure of confidential information or to guarantee the authority and impartiality of the judiciary), (3) the interference is necessary in a democratic society.

Therefore, free expression is subsumed to the concept of "information". The judicial bodies in Strasbourg considered that "information" includes "those produced deliberately, such as radio and television programs (ECHR, 1994), music (ECHR, 1990), advertising messages and commercial speech:

Thus, at European level, freedom of expression goes beyond the limits of political, philosophical or religious discourse, it is not defined by the content, quality or importance of the information, but by the way it is formulated, and comes into play as soon as the information, regardless of its nature, borrows a medium intended to make it public (Sudre, 2006:353).

Within the research topic, we intend to share the point of view belonging to an author who states that

the fact that there is certain information that is covered by various forms of protection based on state, service or professional secrecy, does not mean an automatic prohibition on revealing such information to the public, especially when this information concerns areas of major public interest (Chiriță, 2008:543).

From the point of view of the specific theory, a first paradigm that we want to mention is that of the Theory of Governance and Security. Thus, we can consider that

Security governance can be characterized as an intentional system of rules involving coordination, management (management) and regulation of security issues, by multiple and separate authorities, interventions of both public and private actors, formal and informal arrangements, directed with a specific purpose, in order to obtain precise benefits (Kirchner, 2006:950).

Based on these arguments, we must specify that there is an analytical purpose is to observe and understand (conceptually and theoretically) the overlapping of security mechanisms. This is followed by the practical-political/normative challenge, as the recognition of the coexistence and overlapping of different security orders and mechanisms raises questions about the possibility and future of the world order. Researchers and practitioners alike will have to grapple with these practical, policy, and normative questions in the years to come.

Firstly, our argument addresses the concepts of "balance of power" and "security community" not only as distinct analytical concepts of the security order, but also as mechanisms based on a specific combination of practices. Secondly, this approach opens up the possibility to take a varied view of regional security governance and to conceptualize the idea of overlap. Thirdly, our argument can contribute to better-informed and improved empirical research. For example, by focusing on the overlap of different types of security governance

systems and their associated practices, we could gain a clearer understanding of the structural drivers of security policies or whether a region can transition between security governance systems.

Finally, the argument about overlapping mechanisms significantly influences the way we think about regional boundaries. The traditional notions of geographical/geopolitical borders, as they are currently defined, are defined on the basis of location (answering the question "Where are we?"); social or cognitive notions of boundaries are related to identity (answering the question "Who are we/they?"); and the "practical" notion of boundaries that we develop here, with a focus on overlapping mechanisms, takes into account the practices found (answering the questions "What do we do") (Adler & Greve, 2009:59-84). It is important to treat this analysis implicitly through the prism of the theory of security governance, because, in the opinion of an author,

A security sector can be considered as dysfunctional if it does not provide security to the state and its people in an efficient and effective way or, even worse, if it is the cause of insecurity. Moreover, as a con□sequence of the aforementioned broad definition, a security sector cannot be viewed as functional if it is deficient, it terms of governance. Thus, SSR is meant to reduce security deficits (inefficient and ineffective provision of security or even provision of insecurity) as well as democratic deficits (lack of oversight over the security sector) which result from dysfunctional security sectors. In other words, SSR is a means that serves the objective of providing 'security within the state in an effective and efficient manner, and in the framework of democratic civilian control'. (Hänggi, 2005:8).

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In the current context, in which the security challenges on NATO's Eastern Flank are increasingly complex, being aware of the importance that the regulatory framework has in building resilience, cooperation, respectively in combating various forms of threat, the methodological part of this article will be represented by Causal Layered Analysis (CLA). This is a qualitative method that can be applied to the countries under discussion. Being a prospective method, it will help us understand the perception and discursive analysis, both on the security of each state and on collective security.

Being developed by Sohail Inayatullah, the CLA has a structure consisting of 4 levels: The

first level, titled Litany is the level of the dominant narrative. The second level, the Systematic one, is the institutional level, of structural causes. The next level, entitled Worldview, represents the ideological framework. The last level, but not the last, is that of myth/metaphor, known as the symbolic level or cultural depth.

The present study was applied to a sample of 7 people. These are doctoral students, specialized in the field of national security and lawyers. Each answer was analyzed in an individual, comparative manner, while adhering to academic ethics and maintaining impartiality.

a) **Litany.** Having to answer the following question: What are the main perceived security threats and how are they presented in public discourses in the media? Out of the 7 (seven) respondents, 4 (four) indicated that the main threats come from Russia, as a result of the hybrid war it is waging against Poland, Lithuania and Romania. The other 3 (three) respondents agreed with the view that Russia is the main state that carries out hostile actions against the countries on NATO's Eastern flank, but believe that in addition to hybrid warfare, forced migration represents a growing threat. From the perspective of presentation of public discourses in the media, 6 (six) respondents considered that the discourse is predominantly defensive, alarmist, and 1 (one) respondent opined that the discourse places a lot of emphasis on human vulnerability and less on the ability to respond. We can appreciate that the answers are mostly homogeneous, with a strong consensus. Thus, 100% of respondents believe that Russia is the state that threatens the security of other countries. 100% of the selected experts consider hybrid warfare to be an imminent threat. Only 3 out of 7 experts mentioned migration as a threat: In my view, this layer is relevant, as it outlines the legitimate discourse of security policies and shares the framework of related legislation.

b) **System.** Regarding this layer, the respondents had to express a point of view on the current state of the security legislation in Lithuania, Romania and Poland, specifying, at the same time, the main systematic factors influencing the evolution of this regulatory framework. In this context, 1 out of 7 experts answered that the legislation in the states under analysis is in a continuous adaptability, being influenced by the dynamics of external threats. 4 respondents considered that the legislation is totally fragmented, not being able to counteract threats to collective security in a timely manner. 1 respondent considered that there is no strategic

vision. In the opinion of this respondent, this is a major factor that delays any legislative reform. 1 respondent argued that legislation is capable of being adapted exclusively following critical events, as can be seen throughout history. When asked about the systemic factors identified, 7 out of 7 respondents said that geopolitical pressures (especially that of the war in Ukraine) are factors that attract radical legislative measures. Also, 5 out of 7 respondents said that the primacy of NATO norms is a guideline on legislation. 1 respondent considered that the influence of the media is often a determining factor for the adaptation of legislation. Only 1 expert mentioned the slowness of the decision-making process studied in the 3 states as a factor that hinders effective legislation. From the interpretation of the answers, we can see that, despite the fact that the legislations are not harmonized, there are legislative differences marked by the identity of each state, the systems are interdependent, all 3 states being NATO members. Also, states are fully aware that a security breach on a NATO state is an imminent danger to the implicit address of other states.

c) **Worldview - ideological and identity frameworks.** The selected experts were questioned on the role of national identity and history in the formulation of security policies, corroborating them with the vision of the alliances they belong to (EU and NATO). Thus, we expect that different visions regarding national identity, stability and alliances will emerge within this section. The answers received were extremely pertinent: 3 out of 7 respondents agreed with the point of view that the historical memory regarding the threats coming from the East attracted a clear orientation of the 3 states towards strategic alliances, such as NATO and the EU. 2 respondents stated that the identity of each state was strengthened in the period immediately following the accession of states to these alliances, opining that the strategic culture was implicitly shaped. Also, 1 respondent believes that in Romania, viewed from a comparative perspective with Lithuania and Poland, the identity dimension is not so pronounced. 1 Only one expert believed that the experience of totalitarian regimes determines a real representation of risks, thus directly influencing security policies.

d) **Myth/Metaphor**. When asked what metaphors can define the perception of the security of each state, the perceptions were eminently different. We appreciate that each respondent had a unique vision. In this case, we will analyze each metaphor related to each state:

Lithuania is viewed by 2 people as a "silent storm" Thus, this metaphor can designate a country that, although it does not produce dissension, is in permanent tension. Another metaphor is the "Phoenix Bird". Other phrases used are: "glass shield", symbolizing that although it is a fragile state, it is very well positioned from a strategic point of view and is very well supported internationally. Another perception of this state is that it is like a "lantern in the dark", symbolizing that it is a waking state, in an area of NATO perceived as dangerous. Another respondent believes that Lithuania is like an "Eastern window to Europe", suggesting a warning zone for all other EU member states. A final respondent believes that Lithuania is like a "Baltic watchman", having the duty to guard both the Baltic Sea and prevent any dangers to other areas of Europe.

Poland is the state seen by respondents as a "mirror of a dark past", referring to the security of this state, outlined in the light of the World Wars that affected it. Another respondent sees this state as "a bridge between what is new and what the past means". The metaphor "Smoldering Fire", I must admit, impressed me, as it indicates a felt tension that fuels insecurity. One respondent said that Poland can be classified as a "protective shield of the Baltic Sea", always ready to protect its borders. This country was implicitly characterized by the metaphors "The Power of the Baltic Sea", "Apparent Silence" or "With the Sword on the Table".

Romania, a country strategically positioned in the North Atlantic alliance, is viewed extremely beautifully by all respondents as a "gateway to the Carpathians", suggesting a metaphor between East and West. Another perspective on our country is that of a "suspension bridge". I interpret this metaphor as a phrase that reflects the bridge between the old and the new realities of security legislation. Also, one expert opines that Romania is a "NATO power", while another expert sees Romania as "a shadow of NATO", expressing the need for collective security. Another interesting metaphor is that of "at the crossroads of influences", expressing an area where different strategic interests intersect. Another person believes that Romania's appropriate metaphor is "the fortress under siege", expressing the country's potential vulnerability. Also, a pertinent phrase is the one that refers to Romania as "the barometer of any regional tension", expressing the fact that it is a strong country, which reacts in a prompt and efficient manner to all the changes to which it is subjected.

Considering the methodology presented, we can appreciate that this prospective method proved to be a valuable tool for exploring the way in which the normative discourse of security is built in states that had a totalitarian regime. The varied responses highlighted institutional and ideological realities, as well as interstate cooperation on threats. Thus, we can say that this methodological approach has given us the possibility to make an effective comparison of threats, starting from the critical-constructivist perspective.

2. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research successfully achieved its objective of conducting a comparative, multi-level analysis of the national security frameworks in Romania, Poland and Lithuania. The hypothesis that historical experiences, identity narratives and normative convergence within NATO and the EU significantly shape security perceptions and legislation was confirmed, by applying the Stratified Causal Analysis (CLA) method.

The results of this study reveal a nuanced convergence of discourses, institutional structures and symbolic representations in the three states. At the litany level, hybrid warfare and Russian influence emerge as dominant threats, while *systemic* analysis highlights legislative fragmentation countered by supranational pressure and strategic necessity. The *Worldview layer* emphasizes the role of collective memory and identity in shaping national orientation toward Western alliances, and the *Myth/Metaphor* layer uncovers deep-rooted symbolic constructs that reflect vulnerability, resilience, and strategic positioning.

This layered exploration uncovered not only functional and normative differences between states, but also a common perception of existential threats, especially from the eastern border. Respondents' views reveal how former totalitarian states are reinterpreting sovereignty, freedom of expression and legislative resilience in the light of past trauma and current geopolitical alignment.

As a final point, this research provides valuable insights concerning the construction of security and law-standards in post-totalitarian democracies. Only by understanding these national perspectives, we can build the collective resilience and anticipate the challenges in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

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WORDS, IMAGES AND IDENTITIES: COMPETING FOR INFLUENCE INTO THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION REALM

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Abstract: *The article intends to discuss the concept of identity when speaking about strategic communication within the realm of international politics and to propose a framework to systemize the messages which speak louder for certain audiences or determine the expected results of the communicator. A basic definition of power envisages the ability to accomplish certain goals by using certain instruments of power (of identity?). When referring to strategic communication arena, we wonder why certain messages are considered strategic, while others are perceived as noise. Why some messages have profound effects on people while others have no meaning? To answer to the questions formulated above, we propose a framework of analysis correlated to concepts like identity, state - system, identification theory and legitimacy in order to decipher why certain messages are strategic silver bullets while others are not.*

Keywords: *personal identity; social-identity; state - system; legitimacy; strategic messages*

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of strategic communication, correlated to concepts like propaganda, fake-news, disinformation, manipulation, has recently become in Romania and worldwide a sound thematic. As well within the realm of international politics, the challenges for democracies are related mostly to phenomena like populism, extremism, radicalism or sovereigntism. For instance, the "ideology of sovereignty" won when speaking about BREXIT, a major political event for the international politics scene and of biggest importance for the European Union. Influencing people's political choices becomes a tool for achieving certain political goals, and not only for the internal political arena where parties competing during electoral campaigns may exploit identity narratives, yet for the international global actors as well, the result having profound influences in designing the future world society.

The concept of identity we employ when speaking about strategic communication within the realm of international politics involves a framework of systematization of identities in accordance with the configuration of identities of the targeted audience. In order to generate the expected results, the identities of the audience have major importance. The messages should be addressed to a certain public and configured in such a manner that the public to resonate with its.

The framework of analysis we propose is correlated to concepts like personal identity and social identity, national-state identity, identification and legitimacy.

2. NATIONAL-STATE IDENTITY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

At the beginning of the 20th century an important principle was adopted by the international society as an organizing social category: national collective identity. As the collective identities configured by the nation-state system have been generated during history by the elites, the process being most of the time a top-down approach, nowadays we may asses that the process is reversed. Nowadays we believe that the collective identities are generated by a bottom-up approach, starting with the personal level and then collectively aggregated. The identification process is required in order collective identities to emerge.

Perceived within the European Union context, the identity issue is challenged by the variety of interpretations: national identity, European identity, multiple identities and citizenships, and so on. The theme of national identity of a Romanian-born citizen, for instance, living in another country, becoming a citizen of another country, speaking

another language, accommodating to another country's culture, is very hard to be defined. What is national identity nowadays? Should we acknowledge that fundamental changes in conceiving personal and national identity have occurred recently?

When speaking about national identity, diverse specialists reveal that nationalism fetishizes the nation in the form of a "we" – identity (Fuchs, 2020:22-23):

> the nation is a part of human essence and that is distinguished from enemies (outsiders, other nations, immigrants, refugees, etc.) who are presented as intruders, aliens, sub-humans, uncivilized, parasites, criminals, terrorists, etc. in order to deflect attention from class contradictions and power inequalities.

On the other hand, the scholars analyzing populism consider that the political phenomenon is characteristic for the 21st century and that the populist leaders have succeed to disturb traditional models and practices of electoral competition within occidental societies (Norris & Inglehart, 2019: 3). The most dramatic case of populism they perceived to be the election of Donald Trump as US president. In the European context, the anti-immigration and xenophobic politics are assimilated with the populist movements, while in Latin America, populism is associated with political clientelism. Populism is perceived as an ideology, as a movement or as a syndrome (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017:2).

The common elements the specialists invoke when characterizing populism are related to using different identity categories of the members of the society. The citizens are characterized by populist leaders using some identity-codes or etiquettes which generate simplifying dichotomies, like: the masses and the elite, the corrupt people and the innocents, patriots and traitors, the rich and the poor etc. The common feature of the populists are the narratives which invokes "the people" and denounces the few, be them the elites, the minorities, the LGBTQ, the immigrants, the women, the criminal organizations etc. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017:5). For instance, notices Cruz (2021:316), the Russian President emphasized the use of extremists, separatists and nationalists and the manipulation of the population in order to affect other countries' foreign policy. The quest for personal identity has very important consequences for the world architecture. William Bloom (1990:x) has been raising questions like why do

individuals and mass national populations give their loyalty to the nation-state? Why are they prepared to die for it? The author indicates the identification theory to explain a behavioral dynamic that has not previously been made explicit

> Nation building is then concerned with describing how a general national identification is evoked. […] Insomuch as every identification is made with an external social actor, identification is, of course, a social act as much as a private psychological one. (Bloom, 1990:23-26).

As the constructivist approach of the international relations reveals, the world order depends on people's identification with a "social actor", depends on how people interpret their personal identity and how they act accordingly: if they wish to live in another country, for instance, or if they choose to live where they were born, if they identify as human beings, upholding human rights, or if they adhere to the principle of prioritizing a certain identity, be that the national identity, be that the professional identity, the European identity or the member of the global society.

The right-wing parties' narratives, reveals Fuchs (2020:2), are characterized by top-down leadership, nationalism, the use of the friend/enemy scheme for scapegoating minorities and political opponents, and law and order politics. In right-wing politics, the elements of patriarchy and militarism take the form of law-and-order politics (the belief that crime and social problems can be solved by policing, surveillance, and tough prison sentences) and the form of repressive state apparatuses (the police, the army, the judicial system, the prison system). "They want to organise society as a dictatorship that is built on and uses means of terror."

Another example is highlighted by Cruz (2021:315), showing that Kremlin's relationship with other regions and players of the international scene is intended to uphold and legitimize a significant portion of Moscow's internal policies, thus contributing to reinforce Russian nationalism." Another example, taking into account the slogan "America first", is a clear indication in prioritizing the national identity. As a consequence, the subject of migration is interpreted in correlation with the otherness, and not the sameness with other human beings, elevating and exaggerating the identity differentiation.

3. NARRATIVES AND PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

Having in mind the globalization process, the digital revolution and the widespread means of communication, the possibilities of anyone in influencing the public opinion have expanded. The migration issue or the crisis of migration may be seen as manifestations of identity crisis as well when speaking about people risking their lives crossing, for instance, the Mediterranean Sea on improvised boats (Moceanu, 2016). The personal identity within a world of states has become a resource to be negotiated within the realm of international politics. Being a Chinese, a Russian, an American or a Romanian has no longer unequivocal significations. The condition of an individual of having a certain citizenship or multiple citizenships or being a non-citizen complicates the global puzzle in organizing personal identities, as well the global trends when speaking self-understanding. During previous historical periods, personal identities were not attributes to be regarded as negotiable, but as objective definitions of the Self. The ideology of liberalism upholds the interpretation that the definition of the Self depends mainly on people's personal interpretations and desires. The fact that the Chinese authorities have expanded a system of surveillance of their citizens even abroad, by establishing 102 clandestine police stations acting within 53 countries (Costiță, 2022) is a clear indication that the Chinese authorities adopt unilateral definition for the Chinese people, disrespectful for other possible personal identities or for the human rights doctrine. The Chinese People's Party promotes and implements measures towards their citizens as if they definitively belong to China, giving no consideration to their opinion or other political options.

As the cultural turn and the Informational Revolution have produced worldwide turmoil, the personal identities and identifications, the human rights doctrine, individual liberty are subjects to be discussed and analyzed as organizing principles of the global scene. The personal identification process is mediated by perception, education, individual psychological treats, narratives, other people's worldviews or cultural lens when describing the world or how the world should look like. Addressing the questions of identities, the questions of how the international society should be organized, on which principles, which nations should have a state and which should not, the answers are fundamentally personal answers. It's hard to think that nowadays, in order to get compliance or obedience from the citizens, a

political regime would be successful using strategies of coercion: censorship, surveillance of communications, restrictions of free speech etc. Yet the challenge is related to acquiring consensus and legitimacy at the global scale. The United Nation organization and its Universalist path supports a universal personal identity, as "citizens of the world" and human security doctrine, yet the members of the UN are still the states, not the individuals. The organizing principles of UN combines the realist and liberal precepts. The international society expressed by the UN architecture is not firstly composed of people, but of states containing people having certain identities.

4. DEMOCRACIES AND PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

The authoritarian leaders rejecting the democratic rules have used on the political arena diverse instruments of coercion, criminal code, death penalty and so on in order to reduce individual rights and to limit personal liberties of the citizens. Modifying the Constitution, for instance, Vladimir Putin or Alexander Lukashenko, have used the democratic mechanism of referendum which gave way to multiple presidential mandates, apparently legitimizing them on the will of we-the-people, yet denying the basic principles a democratic regime upholds: individual liberties and minimizing the risk a totalitarian regime to be implemented and the voice of the individuals to be put on silence. Using the criminal code, the leaders of the opposition in diverse countries (e.g. Russia, Turkey, and Belarus) have been annihilated by the governing parties. The argument that the voters have been manipulated by one of the candidates by an unfair electoral campaign determined in Romania the cancellation of presidential election in 2024. The Romanian case problematizes the public opinion formation as being the result of manipulative and disinformation campaigns.

As the global competition for power and influence shifts the arena, the people's minds and the people's perception are at stake. The identification of each person living on the planet Earth has become a very important issue for upholding certain social organization, starting with citizenship. The demographic dimension of a country, the cultural identity of the majority of the people, the influences the migration process might have on society have a great impact upon political choices, even when defining state-identity. The

strategic stakes are to be achieved by narratives, by words and images.

As an example, taking a look at the Republic of Moldova, the Russian propaganda had an objective to artificially promote a different cultural identity for the majority of people living in the Republic of Moldova: the Moldavian identity, presented as an identity different from the Romanian identity. When asked at referendums who they are, the majority of inhabitants of the Republic of Moldova have chosen to identify as Moldavians (Groza, 2025) although there was no specification for an 'ethnic identity', in order to delineate their identity as citizens of the Republic of Moldova (interpreted as Moldavians), from the ethnic identification as Romanians. The difference between ethnic identity and the identity derived from citizenship was specified, not highlighted as a different category of identification at the referendums organized in the Republic of Moldova. As a consequence, the Moldavian identity was propelled and the confusion between the two categories of identities, that derived from state-identity and that derived from ethnic identity, was maintained. Specifying on the referendum form "the Moldavian identity", the authorities acknowledged the differentiation between two ethnic identities, the Romanians and the Moldovans, although objectively there is no distinction between them. The procedure of manipulation consisted in expanding the possibilities for self-identification and in propagating the narratives employed by the Russian propaganda, interested in legitimizing the idea of existence of two different people, the Romanians and the Moldovans.

The personal identity issue as a fundamental principle in organizing the international society is involved in defining the international architecture, scene or puzzle. Constructed, multiple, fluid, differentiated, personal identities have become a strategic resource in achieving different political goals. The questions like "what does it mean to be a patriot nowadays?" or "which rights should be universal?" require personal answers. The answers in authoritarian states are less or not debatable. The voice of the individuals has less or no importance.

5. DIGITAL DIASPORAS AND HYBRID IDENTITIES

Concerning the identity challenges generated by the diasporas, Brinkerhoff (2009:2) argues that migrant integration can be facilitated when the members of diasporas have the liberty and the opportunities to express their hybrid identities collectively. Their hybrid identities refer to a sense of self that is neither wholly of the homeland nor exclusively reflective of the host land.

> Digital diasporas use the Internet to negotiate their identity and promote solidarity; learn, explore, and enact democratic values; and mobilize to peacefully pursue policy influence, service objectives, and economic participation in the homeland. (Brinkerhoff, 2009: 2)

Yet, the question of hybrid identities has been approached from diverse angles. From one perspective, the hybrid identities were interpreted as a threat to global security. In situations of conflict, diaspora communities may raise money to support continuing warfare, promote public opinion and international interventions in support of their cause, and may prevent resolution, even when their compatriots are prepared to negotiate (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Anderson, 1999). The diasporas can generate instability within countries and can have spillover effects with implications for global security.

> Diaspora groups may use the Internet to promote secessionist movements and civil war […] Diasporas' potential constructive contributions encompass policy influence supportive of liberal values, integration and conflict prevention, and socio-economic development. Due to their attachments to the homeland and the ease of telecommunications, diasporas are increasingly apt to insert themselves into economic, political, and development processes vis-a-vis the homeland. (Brinkerhoff, 2009: 6-7)

The variability of the public engagement of diasporas is very large, depending on many factors: historical, cultural, economic, social, political and so on. The rules of engagement cannot be *a priori* prescribed, but contextualized, as there are no general recommendations in approaching, adopting and integrating diasporas, but continuing identity negotiations. The personal identities are multiple, contradictory or complementary, constructed, fluid, having no definitive contours.

6. PERSONAL IDENTITIES AND STRATEGIC USE OF REFERENDUMS

The identity narratives are very important for achieving political ends, like creating new states. As an example, Jacques True (2004) discusses how, in the decade following the end of communist regime in Czechoslovakia, a small group of

political élites with some popular support forged a new Czech identity. Without mobilizing identity as a concept, one cannot comprehend a number of key events in the Czech Republic's transition: the divorce of Czechoslovakia, the fast adoption of a neoliberal reform program, the exclusion of Roma from Czech citizenship, and the relative success of the Czech Republic's application for EU membership. (True, 2004:48)

Formed in January 1993, the Czech Republic is the product of a hegemonizing nation-state project:

> the identity was projected as industrious, modern, rational, masculine, and Western against those groups positioned on the margins of the nation such as Slovaks, Roma, and women. (True, 2004: 48)

What's interesting in the description used in portraying the Checks is the similarity with narratives revealed by Edward Said (1978) in his book, *Orientalism*, when speaking about the differences between Occident and Orient. The exaggeration of difference and the application of clichéd models for perceiving the other has an important intellectual tradition reflecting a Manichean alterity.

The narratives employed and the 'weaponization' of some identity-codes portrayed the Slovaks as belonging to the Soviet sphere, economically backward and irrational. Roma people were presented as lazy, dirty, criminal, and sexually promiscuous. The associations of these groups with the socialist past were the exaggerated differential criteria employed for building the perception of a pro-Western Czech identity.

> Ironically, just as European states were accepting that their identities were multifarious and in flux by recognizing the rights of minorities and equal opportunities for men and women as pillars of their citizenship and EU membership, Czechs were seeking to expedite their return to Europe by expelling minorities and women from public life. (True, 2004:49)

Nowadays, more than ever, the digital context highlights that identities are both phenomena that need to be explained and that can be exploited to generate or to explain the systemic change. Political actors use identity discourses in referendums to achieve their goals. "They do so deliberately and sometimes manipulatively with respect to the general public. Though the technical rules for the use of this device differ from state to state, actors recognize the referendum as one way

and perhaps at times the best way to resolve an issue in their favor." (Walker, 2003:1)

Authoritarian states, notices Walker (2003:1), have developed a fondness for referendums because they grant legitimacy to a policy position by utilizing the vote of the people. For the 21st century, the vote of the people can be extremely malleable. With the implosion of communicational environment, the will of the people may fluctuate and change from one day to another. Public opinion becomes day by day a perishable product. If we are to speak in term of maps for capturing public opinion on different subjects, the map would be different from one moment to another. As theoreticians of democracy inform us, referendums are not inherently democratic just because they measure the will of the people through popular votes (Fisichella, 2007:313; Walker, 2003:2), as legitimacy can be bestowed in principled and unprincipled ways.

Revisiting the nexus between public opinion and culture or "national identity" the results of a referendum may vary as it depends on cultural values. Buckledee (2018:25) argued in his book, *The Language of Brexit,* that the linguistic choices used during campaigns for leaving and for remaining within the EU represent an honest admission that the issue was complex. "In reality, no one could predict with any great confidence what would happen after a vote to quit the EU."

The issue of identities was reflected by the fact that a consistent feature of the Brexit campaign was the concern to the freedom of movement within the EU. The arrival of unsustainable numbers of migrant workers from countries like Poland, Romania and Bulgaria was a major preoccupation, therefore Britain's regaining control of immigration policy was fundamental. (Buckledee, 2018:25-26)

The issue of personal identity becomes a very important feature of the international system. As "the status of information in present day society lifts information warfare from a supporting role to a leading position" (Metcalf, 2021:195), the quest for self-understanding becomes central in defining the global architecture of identities. The most significant feature of the international context relies on the fact that it made almost everyone a participant in the brave new world of information, as Metcalf (2021:196) mentions. The common use of smartphones occurred in the late 2010s. Since then, smartphones have started conquering the world and as a consequence the democratization of information and identities has begun. "People started creating more information by carrying with

them a device that could monitor and record in different ways." (Metcalf 2021:196). Therefore, propaganda has been lifted to new levels. The question of what information aggression means is elaborated upon. The personal identities may become an important resource as well for national construction, but as well for national deconstruction. And its starts with personal self-understandings in the national, regional or global contexts. We may assume that the personal identities are competing for relevance, be them professional, national, ethnic, European, global, regional, gendered, linguistic, religious or whatever feature might seem relevant at a certain point. The ubiquity of smartphones, invoked by Metcalf (2021), indicates the great potential of influencing people's perception and psychology, since the smartphones permits people to be targeted directly, at the individual level.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Having in mind the systemic implications of the informational environment and the fact that the definitional characteristic of the international state-system relies on national-identity/state-identity, we believe that the diverse actors interested in modifying the global architecture may succeed in reaching their goals by prompting identity narratives favorable to them. As long as the human rights doctrine upholds an identification with the humanity and liberalism promotes individual freedoms, regardless of structured/secondary identities, be them national, religious, ethnic, gender identity, etc. the challenge would be to accommodate competing worldviews in organizing the international society, traditionally based on specific and constructed definitions of the Self. "Propaganda is nothing new. What is new, is that it can reach you at any time, in any place and be spread by your friends and family." (Metcalf (2021:201)

The quest for identity in the new era has become a very important issue since the global organizational puzzle is dependent on every individual interpretation. Since there is no 'quality control' of the content of communications, at least in the democratic state, the content may be configured in any manner 'the author' considers to do it. The temptation in democracies to ban communications should be resisted otherwise it would be the precise means to subvert democracy the enemies of democracies might envisage. The freedom of expression may involve as well the redefinition of the Self or of the personal identity

and the process or redefining might involve other people's identity, too. Identity narrative might determine socials movements hard to anticipate, especially when connected with the digital world or when developing hybrid/digital identities.

"I never realized democracy has so many possibilities, so much revolutionary potential", confesses Keen (2007:14). "Media, information, knowledge, content, audience, author—all were going to be democratized by Web 2.0. The Internet would democratize Big Media, Big Business, Big Government. It would even democratize Big Experts, transforming them into *noble amateurs*."

The picture describes the great Informational revolutions the humanity is experiencing, but correlated with the information aggression and with the weaponization of communication the picture at the global scale seems very turbulent and requires a new type of answers and new type of social approach as the stakes are of global magnitude. When speaking about populism, extremism, radicalism, it seems like

democratization, despite its lofty idealization, is undermining truth, souring civic discourse, and belittling expertise, experience, and talent… it is threatening the very future of our cultural institutions. For the real consequence of the Web 2.0 revolution is less culture, less reliable news, and a chaos of useless information. (Keen 2007:15)

Applying the above rationale to identity issues, the personal identification processes may lead to unanticipated dynamics having uncontrollable effects at a global scale.

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