

CRISIS REPATRIATION AND INFORMATION WARFARE: IS THE ROMANIAN STATE PREPARED FOR EXCEPTIONAL SECURITY SITUATIONS?

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Abstract

This article explores whether the Romanian state is adequately prepared to respond to exceptional security situations involving the repatriation of its citizens from conflict-affected areas. The analysis focuses on two recent cases: the evacuation of Romanian private contractors from the Democratic Republic of Congo, following the rapid advance of the M23 rebel group in Goma, and the repatriation of Romanian civilians from the Middle East in a context of increasing regional instability. While both operations highlight a certain level of institutional capability, they also reveal significant vulnerabilities, particularly in terms of coordination, communication, and political interference.

In the case of the Congo mission, public narratives labelling legally contracted personnel as “mercenaries” raise questions about information management and media influence. Similarly, controversies surrounding evacuation decisions in the Middle East case suggest the presence of political pressure affecting operational priorities. Using a qualitative approach based on case study analysis, the article argues that although Romania possesses functional mechanisms for crisis response, these are often undermined by inconsistent strategic communication and politicization. The study contributes to ongoing debates on hybrid threats and emphasizes the need for more resilient and depoliticized crisis management frameworks.

Keywords: crisis repatriation; disinformation; hybrid threats; Romania; state capacity

Introduction

The increasing frequency of complex security crises in recent years has fundamentally reshaped the responsibilities of modern states toward their citizens abroad. Repatriation operations, once considered exceptional and rare, have become recurring challenges that test not only logistical capabilities, but also institutional coherence, political maturity, and strategic communication. In this context, the capacity of a state to protect its citizens outside national borders is no longer limited to operational readiness alone; it also depends on the ability to manage information, public expectations, and political pressures in highly volatile environments.

In the recent years, the obligation of states to ensure the safety of their citizens abroad has become increasingly visible and politically sensitive, particularly in contexts marked by instability and hybrid threats. This development has placed additional pressure on national

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institutions to respond effectively, not only operationally, but also in terms of communication and public accountability.

Romania, as a member of both the European Union and NATO, is expected to demonstrate a certain level of preparedness in responding to such crises. However, recent events suggest that while operational mechanisms may exist, their effectiveness can be significantly affected by factors that go beyond the technical sphere. Two relevant cases illustrate these dynamics: the repatriation of Romanian citizens involved in contractual activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo following the rapid advance of the M23 rebel group in Goma, and the evacuation of Romanian civilians from the Middle East amid deteriorating security conditions.

These cases are particularly significant not only because of the risks faced by those directly involved, but also due to public narratives that developed in the public space. In the Congo case, individuals who had been legally contracted were publicly labelled as “mercenaries”, despite their professional background as reservists and veterans of the national defense and security system. Such framing raises important questions regarding the role of media, political actors, and institutional communication in shaping public perception during crises. Similarly, the Middle East evacuation case generated controversy due to alleged political interference in the prioritization of evacuees, which further fueled public distrust and speculation.

The interaction between crisis management and information dynamics is not new. However, in the current security environment, characterized by hybrid threats, rapid information dissemination, and increasing polarization, these interactions have become more visible and more consequential. Disinformation, narrative manipulation, and politicization can undermine not only public trust, but also the operational effectiveness of state institutions.

Against this backdrop, the present article seeks to address a central question: to what extent is the Romanian state prepared to manage exceptional repatriation situations, and can institutional actors operate effectively in the presence of political and media pressures? By examining the two aforementioned cases, the study aims to identify both strengths and vulnerabilities within Romania’s crisis response framework, with a particular focus on the intersection between operational capability and information management.

The article adopts a qualitative approach based on case study analysis, drawing on publicly available information, media reports, and existing literature in the fields of security studies, crisis management, and information warfare. The objective is not to provide a definitive assessment, but rather to contribute to a broader understanding of how modern states navigate complex security situations in an increasingly contested informational environment.

Literature Review

The growing complexity of contemporary security environments has generated an extensive body of literature addressing the evolving nature of state responsibilities, crisis management, and hybrid threats. In particular, the intersection between operational security and the information domain has become a central focus within security studies, reflecting the increasing relevance of non-kinetic dimensions of conflict.

A key concept underpinning this analysis is state capacity, which refers to the extent to which public institutions are able to formulate and carry out policies, particularly in situations of crisis or emergency. Scholars such as Francis Fukuyama argue that state capacity is not limited to formal structures, but also includes coordination, legitimacy, and the

ability to respond coherently under pressure¹. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of repatriation operations, where multiple institutional actors must act in a synchronized manner under conditions of uncertainty.

Closely related is the field of *crisis management*, which has traditionally focused on preparedness, response, and recovery phases. According to Arjen Boin and his collaborators, effective crisis management requires not only operational readiness but also the capacity to manage meaning, that is, to shape public understanding of the crisis². This dimension becomes critical in situations where media narratives and political discourse can influence both public perception and institutional legitimacy.

The concept of *hybrid warfare* further expands the analytical framework by integrating conventional and unconventional means of conflict. Frank G. Hoffman defines hybrid threats as the simultaneous use of military, irregular, and informational tools to achieve strategic objectives³. In recent years, this concept has been increasingly associated with the use of *disinformation* and *information manipulation* as instruments of influence, particularly in democratic societies.

The role of information in shaping security outcomes has been extensively analyzed within the literature on *information warfare*. Scholars such as P. W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking highlight how the digital environment enables rapid dissemination of narratives that can distort reality, amplify tensions, and undermine trust in institutions⁴. In such contexts, the line between domestic political communication and strategic information operations can become increasingly blurred.

Disinformation, as a subset of information warfare, has been recognized as a major challenge for modern states. According to the European Commission, disinformation consists of information that is deliberately created or shared in a misleading manner with the intention of deceiving audiences⁵. Research has shown that disinformation campaigns can have tangible effects on public opinion, electoral processes, and crisis responses⁶. In this context of security crises, such as evacuations or repatriations, misleading narratives can generate confusion, erode trust, and place additional pressure on decision-makers.

A further body of research addresses the ways in which security issues become subject to political framing and instrumentalization. As noted by scholars like Didier Bigo, security issues are often framed in ways that serve political agendas, particularly in democratic systems where public perception plays a crucial role⁷. This politicization can lead to the prioritization of symbolic actions over operational effectiveness, especially in high-visibility situations such as crisis evacuations.

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, Cornell University Press, 2004, pp. 3-10

² Arjen Boin, et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leader Under Pressure*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 1-8

³ Frank G. Hoffman, *Hybrid Warfare and Challenges*, "Joint Force Quarterly", No. 52, 2009 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315814803-35>

⁴ P. W. Singer, Emerson T. Brooking, *LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018, pp. 21-30

⁵ European Commission, *Code of Practice on Disinformation*, 2018, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2018-code-practice-disinformation> (21.04.2026)

⁶ Soroush Roy, Deb Vosoughi, Aral Sinan, *The spread of true and false news online*, "Science", 2018, DOI: 10.1126/science.aap9559

⁷ Didier Bigo, *Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease*, "Alternatives", Vol. 27 (1), 2002, pp. 63-92 <https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754020270S10>

In parallel, studies on *civil-military relations* and the use of private security actors provide important insights into the Congo case. The increasing reliance on private contractors in conflict zones has been widely documented, with scholars noting both the operational advantages and the legal and ethical ambiguities associated with such arrangements¹. The labeling of such actors as “mercenaries” often reflects political or media narratives rather than precise legal definitions, contributing to public misunderstanding.

Furthermore, the literature on *strategic communication* emphasizes the importance of coherent and transparent messaging during crises. According to research conducted by institutions such as NATO, effective communication can enhance resilience, counter disinformation, and support operational objectives². Conversely, inconsistent or politically influenced messaging can have the opposite effect, amplify uncertainty and undermine institutional credibility.

Finally, recent studies have highlighted the challenges posed by *rapid information cycles* and social media ecosystems. The speed at which information circulates today leaves little room for verification, increasing the risk of narrative distortion³. In such environments, even isolated incidents can be amplified and transformed into broader controversies, as appears to be the case in both scenarios analyzed in this article. Taken together, this body of literature provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between operational capacity, information dynamics, and political factors in crisis situations. It also underscores the need for an integrated approach that goes beyond traditional security paradigms, incorporating elements of communication, governance, and societal resilience.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research design, centered on a comparative case study approach, in order to examine the Romanian state’s capacity to manage exceptional repatriation situations under conditions of heightened security risk. This methodological choice is particularly suitable given the exploratory nature of the research question and the complexity of the phenomena under analysis, which involve institutional behavior, information dynamics, and political context.

The analysis focuses on two recent and distinct cases: the repatriation of Romanian citizens involved in contractual activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, following the advance of the M23 rebel group in the city of Goma, and the evacuation of Romanian civilians from the Middle East amid deteriorating regional security conditions. These cases were selected based on their relevance, temporal proximity, and the presence of both operational and informational challenges, allowing for a comparative perspective.

Data collection relies primarily on open-source materials, including official statements, media reports, and publicly available documentation. While such sources may present certain limitations in terms of completeness or potential bias, they are also essential for capturing the information environment surrounding the events, which constitutes a central dimension of the analysis⁴. In addition, the study draws upon existing academic literature in

¹ P. W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, Cornell University Press, 2007, pp. 15-25

² NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *Strategic Communications Handbook*, 2017 <https://mpsoctc.army.gr/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/NATO-StratCom-Handbook-2017.pdf>

³ Maria Haigh, et al., *Information Literacy vs. Fake News*, “Open Information Science”, Vol. 3(1), pp. 154-165, DOI:10.1515/opis-2019-0011

⁴ Arjen Boin, et al, *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 7-15

the fields of security studies, crisis management and information warfare, as outlined in the previous section. The analysis is based on a qualitative triangulation strategy, combining multiple types of sources in order to reduce potential bias. Media reports are cross-referenced with official statements and secondary academic literature where available. Although access to primary data such as interviews or internal documents was not possible, the study mitigates this limitation by comparing independent sources and identifying converging patterns of information.

In this study, media narratives are treated primarily as objects of analysis rather than as definitive sources of factual evidence. Their role is to illustrate how public discourse is constructed and how perceptions are shaped during crisis situations, particularly in environments characterized by uncertainty and rapid information flows. From an analytical perspective, the study employs elements of process tracing and narrative analysis. Process tracing allows for the reconstruction of key events and decision-making sequences, highlighting institutional responses and coordination mechanisms¹. At the same time, narrative analysis is used to examine how different actors, including media outlets and political figures, have framed the events, thereby influenced public perception and potentially affected institutional credibility. This study does not aim to offer a complete or definitive reconstruction of the events, but instead seeks to highlight recurring patterns, underlying tensions, and structural issues arising from the interplay between operational responses and the informational environment.

The analysis remains cautious in its interpretation of contested or sensitive aspects, relying on corroborated information and avoiding unverified claims. The methodological approach also reflects an awareness of the broader context in which modern security operations take place. As highlighted in recent scholarship, crisis response cannot be understood in isolation from the informational and political environments in which it unfolds². Therefore, the study integrates these dimensions in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of state preparedness and institutional resilience.

Case study I: Democratic Republic of Congo

The first case under examination concerns the repatriation of a group of Romanian citizens who were present in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly in and around the city of Goma. Their presence in the area was linked to contractual engagements with local authorities, reportedly involving training activities for the Congolese armed forces. The situation deteriorated rapidly following the advance of the M23 rebel group, which led to the effective loss of control over the city and created a highly volatile security environment. In this context, the Romanian citizens found themselves in a situation of acute risk, characterized by limited mobility, uncertain access to essential resources, and the constant threat of violence. Reports indicate that for several days, they remained in a precarious state, awaiting evacuation under conditions that can reasonably be described as critical. The subsequent repatriation operation, which resulted in their return to Romania, reflects the existence of functional mechanisms capable of facilitating extraction from conflict zones.

From an operational standpoint, the case suggests that Romanian authorities were able to coordinate, at least to a certain extent, the logistical aspects required for repatriation. This

¹ Alexander L. George, Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, MIT Press, 2005, pp. 67-80

² Louise K. Comfort, *Crisis Management in Hindsight*, "Public Administration Review", Vol. 67, pp. 189-197, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00827.x>

includes diplomatic engagement, transportation arrangements, and post-arrival procedures. However, the effectiveness of such operations cannot be assessed solely in terms of logistical success; it must also take into account the broader institutional response, including communication strategies and the treatment of returning individuals.

A particularly sensitive aspect of this case relates to the *public framing* of the individuals involved. Despite indications that their presence in the Democratic Republic of Congo was based on legal contractual arrangements, a segment of public discourse, amplified by certain media narratives, labeled them as “mercenaries”. This characterization, while not uncommon in discussions involving private security actors, carries significant normative and emotional weight, potentially influencing public perception in a negative manner. The use of such terminology raises important questions regarding the *accuracy and responsibility of public communication* during crisis situations. As highlighted in the literature, labels and narratives can shape not only how events are understood, but also how institutions are perceived¹. In this case, the discrepancy between the legal status of the individuals and their public portrayal may have contributed to confusion, stigmatization, and a lack of clarity in the broader societal response.

Another aspect that warrants attention is the *post-arrival treatment* of the repatriated individuals. Reports indicating that they were subjected to medical checks, identification procedures, and questioning upon arrival are not, in themselves, unusual in the context of international crisis operations. However, the perception among some of those involved that these measures may have been conducted in a manner intended to generate media visibility introduces an additional layer of complexity. While relevant, the analysis distinguishes between verified facts and publicly expressed perceptions, particularly in relation to claims regarding the conduct of authorities and the interpretation of events.

Overall, the Congo case illustrates a dual dynamic. On the one hand, it demonstrates that the Romanian state possesses a certain capacity to intervene and repatriate its citizens under difficult conditions. On the other hand, it reveals vulnerabilities in the areas of *strategic communication, narrative management, and the depoliticization of security-related actions*.

Case study II: Middle East evacuation

The second case analyzed in this study concerns the repatriation of Romanian citizens from a region in the Middle East affected by a deteriorating security environment. In contrast to the Congo case, where the individuals involved were operating under contractual arrangements, this situation primarily involved civilians whose presence in the region was linked to personal, professional, or familial reasons. The escalation of tensions and the increasing risk to civilian populations necessitated the organization of evacuation measures by Romanian authorities.

From an operational perspective, the evacuation process reflects the existence of institutional mechanisms designed to respond to external crises affecting Romanian citizens abroad. These mechanisms typically involve coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic missions, and other relevant state institutions, as well as cooperation with international partners when necessary. Such frameworks are consistent with broader European practices regarding consular protection and emergency response². However, the case also generated public controversy, particularly in relation to the *prioritization of*

¹ Robert M. Entman, *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, “Journal of Communication”, Vol. 43/4, pp. 51-58, 1993, DOI:[10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x)

² European Union, *Consular Protection Directive (EU) 2015/637*, Official Journal of the European Union <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32015L0637> (21.04.2026)

evacuees. Media reports and public discussions raised questions about the criteria used in determining who would be evacuated and in what order. Allegations of preferential treatment, including references to the involvement of political figures in influencing decisions, contributed to a climate of suspicion and debate. In this context, it is important to distinguish between confirmed information and publicly circulated perceptions, especially when assessing allegations of political influence on operational decisions.

This situation highlights the inherent challenges associated with *decision-making under pressure*, where limited resources, time constraints, and evolving risks require rapid prioritization. In such contexts, even well-founded decisions can become controversial if they are not accompanied by clear and transparent communication. As emphasized in the literature on crisis governance, perceived fairness and procedural legitimacy are essential for maintaining public trust¹. The controversy surrounding this case also illustrates the role of *media amplification* in shaping public discourse. In the absence of complete or verified information, isolated elements can be magnified and interpreted in ways that reinforce existing narratives about political influence or institutional bias. This dynamic is further intensified in digital environments, where information circulates rapidly and often without sufficient contextualization².

Another issue that deserves attention is how political leaders and administrative bodies work together in practice. In democratic systems, political oversight of executive action is both legitimate and necessary. However, when such involvement is perceived as interfering with operational processes, particularly in sensitive contexts such as crisis evacuations, it can generate tensions between political accountability and professional autonomy.

Overall, the Middle East case underscores the complexity of crisis response in contemporary settings. While the Romanian state appears to possess the institutional capacity to organize evacuations, the effectiveness of these operations is influenced not only by logistical factors, but also by issues of *transparency, communication, and the perceived integrity of decision-making processes*.

Information Manipulation and Media Narratives

The two cases analyzed in this article reveal a common and significant dimension: the role of information in shaping the understanding and perception of crisis situations. In both instances, public narratives evolved rapidly, often diverging from the available factual information and contributing to a complex informational environment.

In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the characterization of Romanian contractors as “mercenaries” represents a particularly illustrative example of *narrative framing*. While the term itself has a specific legal meaning under international law, its use in public discourse is often broader and carries strong normative connotations³. The application of this label, in the absence of a clear contextualization, may have influenced public perception in ways that do not fully reflect the legal or operational realities of the situation.

Such framing can be understood within the broader context of *information dynamics in crisis situations*, where uncertainty, urgency, and limited access to verified information

¹ Arjen, Boin; Paul Hart, Allan McConnell, *Crisis Exploitation*, “Journal of European Public Policy”, Vol. 16/1, 2009, DOI:10.1080/13501760802453221

² Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Polity Press, 2012, pp. 5-12

³ Sarah V. Percy, *Mercenaries: The History of a Norm in International Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 1-10

create conditions conducive to the emergence of simplified or emotionally charged narratives. Existing research suggests that media organizations are pivotal in such contexts, not only disseminating information but also shaping how events are understood¹.

In the Middle East case, information dynamics manifested differently, but with comparable effects. The focus on alleged irregularities in evacuation prioritization, including references to individual cases, contributed to a narrative centred on potential political interference. Even in the absence of definitive evidence, such narratives can gain traction, particularly when they resonate with broader concerns about governance and accountability.

The dynamics are further intensified by the influence of social media platforms. Unlike traditional media, which operate within certain editorial frameworks, social media environments allow for the rapid dissemination of unverified or partially verified information. This can lead to the formation of parallel narratives, some of which may be inaccurate or misleading, yet still influential².

It is important to emphasize that information manipulation does not necessarily imply deliberate intent by all actors involved. Rather, it can emerge from a combination of factors, including selective reporting, interpretative biases, and the structural characteristics of contemporary information ecosystems. However, in certain cases, the possibility of *strategic narrative construction* – whether for political, reputational, or other purposes – cannot be entirely excluded.

The implications of these dynamics are significant. Beyond shaping public perception, information narratives affect the *legitimacy of institutions*, the morale of those directly involved in operations, and the overall effectiveness of crisis response. In this sense, information becomes not merely a reflection of events, but an integral component of the security environment itself.

Political Interference and Institutional Vulnerabilities

The analysis of the two case studies suggests that, beyond operational and informational challenges, a critical dimension affecting crisis response lies in the relationship between political authority and institutional autonomy. In democratic systems, political oversight is both legitimate and necessary; however, the boundary between oversight and interference can become blurred, particularly in high-pressure situations characterized by urgency, uncertainty, and public visibility.

In both cases examined, elements of *perceived politicization* emerged within public discourse. In the Congo case, the framing of repatriated individuals and the management of their return generated debates that extended beyond operational considerations, touching upon broader issues of legitimacy and narrative control. In the Middle East case, controversies related to evacuation prioritization raised questions about the influence of political actors on administrative decision-making processes.

The literature on *bureaucratic autonomy* emphasizes the importance of maintaining a degree of professional independence within administrative structures, particularly in specialized domains such as security and crisis management³. When operational decisions are perceived to be influenced by political considerations, this can lead to several negative consequences, including reduced efficiency, internal friction, and diminished public trust.

¹ Brian McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication*, Routledge, 2017, pp. 18-27

² Claire Wardle; Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder*, Council of Europe, 2017 <https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PREMS-162317-GBR-2018-Report-de%CC%81sinformation-1.pdf> (21.04.2026)

³ Daniel Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*, Princeton University Press, 2001, pp. 4-12

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that crisis situations often require rapid decision-making under conditions of incomplete information. In such contexts, political leaders may feel compelled to intervene, either to ensure accountability or to respond to public pressure. The challenge lies in ensuring that such involvement does not undermine the expertise and procedural integrity of the institutions responsible for implementation.

Another relevant aspect concerns the *institutional resilience* of the state. Resilience, in this context, refers not only to the capacity to absorb and respond to shocks, but also to the ability to maintain coherence and legitimacy in the face of external and internal pressures¹. The cases analyzed suggest that while Romania possesses certain operational capabilities, its institutional resilience may be affected by vulnerabilities in coordination, communication, and the management of political-institutional relations.

Furthermore, the interaction between political dynamics and information environments can create feedback loops that amplify tensions. Media narratives highlighting alleged irregularities or controversial decisions can increase public scrutiny, which in turn may lead to further political involvement. This cycle can complicate crisis management efforts and shift the focus from operational effectiveness to reputational considerations.

It is therefore essential to consider not only whether institutions are capable of acting, but also whether they are able to do so *independently, coherently, and consistently*, without undue external influence. This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of modern security challenges, where the credibility of state action is as important as its effectiveness.

Discussions

The findings of this study point to a nuanced and multifaceted assessment of the Romanian state's preparedness to manage exceptional repatriation situations. On the one hand, both cases demonstrate the existence of functional mechanisms capable of facilitating the extraction and return of citizens from high-risk environments. This suggests a baseline level of operational capacity, supported by diplomatic networks and institutional frameworks aligned with international practices.

On the other hand, the analysis reveals a series of structural and contextual challenges that may limit the effectiveness of these mechanisms. Broadly speaking, these challenges fall into three interconnected categories: coordination of operations, management of information, and the interaction between political and institutional actors.

From an operational perspective, while the execution of repatriation missions appears to have been ultimately successful, the processes leading up to these outcomes were marked by uncertainty and, in some instances, perceived inconsistencies. This underlines that possessing adequate capabilities is not sufficient in itself; their effective, timely, and transparent use is equally crucial.

The information dimension emerges as a particularly significant factor. In both cases, the absence of clear, consistent, and authoritative communication appears to have created space for alternative narratives to develop. These narratives, whether based on partial information or interpretative framing, have the potential to influence public perception and to undermine trust in state institutions. As such, *strategic communication* should be regarded as an integral component of crisis management, rather than a secondary consideration.

The political factor introduces an additional level of complexity to the situation. It should be emphasized that political oversight represents a legitimate and necessary

¹ Louise K. Comfort; Arjen Boin; Chris Demchak, *Designing Resilience*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010, pp. 1-9

component of democratic governance, and its presence in crisis situations does not inherently indicate inappropriate interference. The perception that political actors may influence operational decisions, even if not always substantiated, can have significant implications for institutional legitimacy. In democratic systems, maintaining a balance between accountability and professional autonomy is essential, particularly in sensitive areas such as security and emergency response.

Taken together, these findings suggest that preparedness cannot be understood solely in terms of technical or logistical capability. Rather, it must be conceptualized as a broader form of institutional readiness, encompassing coordination, communication, and governance. In this sense, the question is not only whether the state can act, but also how it acts, under what conditions, and with what degree of coherence and credibility.

Similar challenges have been observed in other European states, where crisis repatriation operations have also been affected by communication gaps, media pressure, and political scrutiny. This suggests that the Romanian case may reflect broader patterns within contemporary crisis management rather than an isolated national phenomenon.

Conclusions

This article set out to examine whether the Romanian state is prepared to manage exceptional situations involving the repatriation of its citizens from conflict-affected regions, and whether institutional actors can operate effectively in the presence of political and informational pressures. By analyzing two recent cases – the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Middle East – the study has identified both strengths and vulnerabilities within the current crisis response framework.

The findings indicate that Romania possesses a *functional operational capacity* for organizing repatriation missions, supported by diplomatic and institutional structures. This capacity enables the state to respond to external crises and to ensure, at least at a basic level, the protection of its citizens abroad.

However, the analysis also highlights significant challenges. The *management of information* during crises appears to be inconsistent, allowing for the emergence of narratives that may distort public understanding and affect institutional credibility. At the same time, *the interaction between political actors and administrative structures* introduces potential risks related to perceived or actual interference in operational processes.

These dynamics suggest that the effectiveness of crisis response is influenced not only by material resources and organizational structures, but also by less tangible factors such as trust, legitimacy, and coherence. In an environment characterized by hybrid threats and rapid information flows, these factors become increasingly important.

In response to the research question, it can be argued that the Romanian state is *partially prepared* for such situations. While the necessary mechanisms are in place, their performance is contingent upon the ability to manage political pressures and information dynamics in a manner that preserves institutional integrity.

Future efforts should therefore focus on strengthening *strategic communication*, enhancing *inter-institutional coordination*, and ensuring a clearer delineation between political oversight and operational decision-making. Such measures would contribute to a more resilient and credible crisis management framework, better suited to the challenges of the contemporary security environment.

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