

## NATIONAL SECURITY

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### ROMANIA'S SECURITY CULTURE – THE HOT POTATO WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT

<b>Abstract:</b>	<p><i>The Covid-19 crisis has been a flaws' indicator that every society is affected by, including Romania. The health crisis has been toppled by political turmoil and a concerning increase of the gap between the population and the ruling elites. This crisis is founded on disinformation, fake news, and the rise of the far-right. This paper argues that there is a need for political dissidents' direct involvement in promoting security culture and education in the Romanian society of today.</i></p> <p><i>The first premise imputed is that the ongoing crisis produced by the pandemic weakens the democratic structure of the society. Being a low-trust society, a vice inherited from the communist era, Romanian citizens tend to be skeptical about the decisions taken by their elected politicians and therefore diminish or exclude serious threats to national and human security.</i></p> <p><i>That behavior represents an obstacle to the well-functioning of the state and the promotion of the National Defense Strategy 2020-2024. A strong security culture would imply automatically a tighter relation between security services and the Romanian citizens, leading in the end to an overall better status quo.</i></p>
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#### Introduction

In addition to the conventional threats that challenge the security system of Romania today, a pressing question has been slowly arising: “How to reshape the system to be better prepared for the upcoming crises?”. The Covid-19 pandemic has been testing the resilience of security systems and democracies all over the world, forcing decision-makers to think strategically about the next steps. This process, however, would be futile were the population to not completely believe in and stand behind it. After all, this paper first and foremost addresses the social dimension of the security services. Bluntly speaking, it assumes that “intelligence services should be understood as social enterprises<sup>1</sup>”.

The *National Defense Strategy 2020-2024* attests the special role and implications that the pandemic has had over the security system, endangering its relation with an important category of security beneficiaries- the citizens. From 2020 onwards, the international security system has been utterly disturbed<sup>2</sup>. The efforts of political dissidents in contribution with security leaders shall focus on avoiding such crisis from ever occurring again, concentrating their efforts around the prevention activity. In order for the top-level decision-makers to be able to coordinate among each other and take valuable decisions, they must have the Romanian citizens’ support and trust, as social capital is an overall requirement for all decisions, especially since we are speaking about a democracy, and an active member of the international community- a member of NATO and the European Union. This issue certainly must take into account the peculiar status that Romania holds as a former communist country; whose regime was the only one in Europe which ended in unprecedented violence. The concept of security had an entirely different meaning three decades ago, resulting in the population’s trust not being placed anywhere near the ruling elite’s priorities.

A successful process of combating this vicious mentality inherited from the past, action deemed necessary in the present-day context, would resemble the following scenario: if the population places their trust in the decision-makers (based of course on previous security education and individual research), the security culture would be strengthened and the national policies would acquire legitimacy and support. The ultimate goal of the process is the application of the *National Defense Strategy* accordingly.

This paper presents, using both qualitative research methods (content analysis of former literature on the subject, and legal documents), and quantitative studies (mainly measuring the trust citizens have in public institutions), a potential solution for achieving the before-mentioned desirable scenario, by regarding

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<sup>1</sup> Irena Chiru, *Engaging Public Support and Awareness in Intelligence: The Demands and Challenges to Developing an Intelligence Culture*, “International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence”, Bucharest, 2016, p.507

<sup>2</sup> Presidential Administration of Romania, *National Defense Strategy 2020-2024*, Bucharest, 2020, [https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National\\_Defence\\_Strategy\\_2020\\_2024.pdf](https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National_Defence_Strategy_2020_2024.pdf), p.4, (20.10.2021)

Romania's political dissidents as key agents tasked with the responsibility of providing security education and culture.

### **Theoretical boundaries- defining the central concepts**

Before developing the arguments supporting the thesis, theoretical clarifications ought to be made. The term "security" alone has multiple definitions in the academic field but also various lenses ascribed to it ("security" could be understood as a concept, a system, or as a theoretical battleground)<sup>1</sup>. For the sake of clarity and brevity, we may understand security simply as the inexistence of threats<sup>2</sup>.

When it comes to "culture", the problem does not simplify either. Samuel Barnes distinguishes three levels of analysis, starting from the most obvious aspects, those who could be directly and easily observed by the common eye (behavior, artifacts, etc.), to the symbolic meaning (beliefs, values), and ending with the interpretations given to facts (meanings, assumptions, etc.)<sup>3</sup>. To sum it up, culture directly and tightly involves the social dimension, as Wildavsky also seeks to capture in his definition- "cultures are "grand theories" or paradigms which organize perceptions by selecting relevant information which is the basis for the formation of preferences"<sup>4</sup>.

By placing the two terms together, we obtain the desired product – "security culture" ("a set of enduring and shared assumptions, beliefs and attitudes about threats and referent objects"<sup>5</sup>) - vital for closing the gap between the elites and the population.

To lay the basis of this paper's arguments and emphasize the social element in the discussion, important functions of security culture ought to be enumerated. Firstly, the core function is establishing the identity of a group (in this case we refer to the national level, hence the population of the Romanian state) and then providing the basis of social solidarity, a powerful engine for good governance. Up to this point, the citizens would have the same values and beliefs and focus on the same goals. This form of cohesion is most desirable for every state, especially in times of unprecedented pressure such as the Covid-19 health,

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<sup>1</sup> Monica Gariup, *European Security Culture Language, Theory, Policy*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009, pp. 19-47

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Wolfers, *National Security as an Ambiguous Symbol*, "Political Science Quarterly", Vol. 67, No. 4, 1952, pp. 481-502

<sup>3</sup> Samuel H. Barnes, *Politics and culture*, Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 1988, p. 132

<sup>4</sup> Aaron Wildavsky, *Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation*, "American Political Science Review", Vol. 81, No. 1, 1987, pp.16-17

<sup>5</sup> Monica Gariup, *Op. cit.*, pp. 19-47.

political, and security crisis. Secondly, it establishes the elements that shall compose the social form of security<sup>1</sup>.

But, to reach the superior level of culture, one has to begin by stressing the impact of security education. We adopt the view that security education is the primer step to achieving a strong, resilient security culture<sup>2</sup>.

### **Wrongs preserved since the Communist years- low trust, skepticism, the villain role of Securitate**

Achieving a fresh start when it comes to the public conception about security services and institutions would imply the dissociation with the relics of the Communist past. Again, the most rational way forward has to involve the efforts of political dissidents as facilitators in this sense. Why? Because most often intelligence services per se are defined through the lens of a simple objective: supplying the decision-makers with intelligence<sup>3</sup>. The problem with this rationale is an imposed hierarchization that does not serve democracy, placing the national leaders and the security services on a superior level from the citizens i.e., the voters. If the population is deprived of the right to be involved in the decisions that would later affect them and their nation, the image of security will not improve but worsen, and the efforts to achieving a security culture will be in vain.

This goal has a primer obstacle that could not be easily removed- the Communist past. We shall begin by describing the first step in the process of *lustration* (purification, removing former Communist elements from the society), more specifically, how security culture appeared as a desideratum in Romania.

The *Securitate* was perceived as a secret, controlling machinery aimed at keeping the Romanian population in line. It has produced numerous victims during the Communist years. Its tradition could hardly be reversed, but declassifying the secret files and tasking neutral agencies with the role of analyzing them, such as National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) has been a breakthrough. Unfortunately, the lustration process is much more complex than that. The need to attach a face to the crimes committed during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime is fundamental for bringing reconciliation with Romania's citizens. But the arduous course of events, namely bringing to trial the perpetrators of violence from the bloody revolution of December 1989 was being stalled, again and again, having an important impact on public opinion and their trust in the new democratic system. Associations and historians stated in the media that the mass shooting of

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<sup>1</sup> Paula-Diana Mantea, *Security Awareness in Romania—Security Culture and Social Responsibility Development Pillar*, “Land Forces Academy Review”, Vol. XXIV, No. 3(95), 2019, pp. 199-207

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>3</sup> Irena Chiru, *Op.cit.*, p.508

innocent civilians in the University square was the doing of Securitate<sup>1</sup>. Erasing the violent images and memories from citizens' minds and turning a new page in their relationship with novel security institutions that appeared in post-1989 Romania is therefore not as easy as it may seem. The declassification of the Securitate archives nonetheless helped to introduce a security culture in Romania, considered being a facilitating factor to creating long-lasting democracies. This bears specific importance especially since Romania had a particular unique transition to democracy, beginning the process without intelligence whatsoever.

Another difficulty was identified in the role of intelligence and security institutions altogether. From an academic point of view, intelligence has a multi-disciplinary essence, hard to pinpoint<sup>2</sup>. Secrecy is the most common characteristic ascribed to it, which happens to clash with the fundamental principles of democracy, and, the nature of good governance promoted by the European Union—*openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence*<sup>3</sup>. The traditional definition of intelligence agencies, linked with covert operations, does not spark trust in the eyes of the population. It consequently becomes even more difficult to break down certain long-living stereotypes.

All social behavior described so far has a clear result that defines and labels Romanian society as *low-trust*. Acquiring legitimacy for the decisions taken at the national level without the trust of the population that their best interest is at stake harms the governing process and causes general public unrest and skepticism that, as a result, only delays important policies. And, as Fukuyama argued, the communities which are bound to succeed are those that disable a high-trust character<sup>4</sup>, this, unfortunately, has not yet been the case in post-communist Romania.

Two primer levels of trust are identified—*institutional and social trust*. We shall focus on institutional trust as we are concerned with the relation between the state (state institutions) and the population, which has to break away from the insecurities, suspicions, and fear of intrusiveness to prosper<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Hockenos, *Long Shadow: How Romania's Securitate turned the Revolution into Riches*, "Balkan Insight", 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/02/03/long-shadow-how-romanias-securitate-turned-the-revolution-into-riches/>, (03.07.2021)

<sup>2</sup> Liam Gearon, *Education, Security and Intelligence Studies*, "British Journal of Educational Studies", Vol. 63, No.3, 2015, pp. 263-279

<sup>3</sup> *European Governance— a white paper com (2001) 428 final (2001/C 287/01)*, in "Official Journal of the European Communities", 2001, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52001DC0428&from=EN>, (29.09.2021)

<sup>4</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Trust. The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, Free Press, 1995, p. 20

<sup>5</sup> Constantin Mitrut, Daniela Serban, Simona Vasilache, *Indicators of Social Trust in Romania-A Quantitative Analysis*, [http://ecocyb.ase.ro/nr\\_2013\\_pdf/ConstantinMitrut.pdf](http://ecocyb.ase.ro/nr_2013_pdf/ConstantinMitrut.pdf), (03.07. 2021)

In the next sections, we will argue that security culture is the most probable means to repair the broken relationship of trust and those political dissidents have the main responsibility of carrying this mission to the end.

### **The turbulent present of Romania**

If one thing is clear regarding the Covid-19 situation in the Romanian society is the fact that it is toppled with insecurity and skepticism, and the governing cabinet which was overburdened with the difficult situation from the first months of the pandemic has suffered by public critiques and inconsideration like never before. The main point to be argued in this section is that the vices described so far, which were inherited from the communist years, have been augmented by the appearance of a global pandemic. In the end, the ambition of creating a prosperous environment for strengthening the security culture in Romania becomes truly difficult.

Covid-19 skepticism became deeply intertwined within the national authorities' distrust<sup>1</sup>, diminishing the process of creating a stronger bond based on openness and transparency, and reaching a common perspective on the national threats which must be neutralized by the competent security agencies. Moreover, if Romania's case is assessed in the international context as well, an additional challenge with regard to security must be accounted for and analyzed- namely, the current debate between the need for surveillance and the request for individual privacy that has been going on recently<sup>2</sup>.

Protecting the security culture advances involves the need for social resilience. To achieve this in the first instance, social cohesion is deemed necessary, and also a consensus on the magnitude of threats posed to the Romanian state. Sadly, disinformation and fake news seriously harm the process of security education, and implicitly creating a strong security culture<sup>3</sup>. To be involved in preserving the security of a state (and its society) a deep level of knowledge is required. Having eroded trust in public institutions undermines this purpose<sup>4</sup>.

Misjudging the essence of the freedom of speech came to segregate the Romanian population even more. Two classes of people could be identified in the light of recent events: Covid-19 deniers and those who are not. This gap alone has come to cost precious energy and efforts which could have been invested into building a consistent security culture in Romania. The behavior of a section of the

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<sup>1</sup> Matei Rosca, *Disinformation fuels Romania's coronavirus spike*, "Politico", 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/as-infections-grow-in-romania-so-does-corona-scepticism/> (29.09.2021)

<sup>2</sup> Liam Gearon, *Op. cit.* pp. 263-279

<sup>3</sup> Presidential Administration of Romania, *National Defense Strategy 2020-2024*, [https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National\\_Defence\\_Strategy\\_2020\\_2024.pdf](https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National_Defence_Strategy_2020_2024.pdf), pp. 24-25

<sup>4</sup> *Covid-19 threatening global peace and security, UN chief warns*, UN News, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061502>, (29.09.2021)

population- which has been joining mass protests to oppose the restrictions imposed by the government to protect the citizens' health- reinforces a dangerous antagonism between the citizen and the state which resembles the scene of the communist years. Bluntly put, the progress of society has been undoubtedly interfered with.

Changing the perspective, we shall address the dangers to cybersecurity, as well. The already concerning increase of cyberterrorism cases, phishing attacks and multiple attempts at de-stabilizing a state's cybersecurity<sup>1</sup> could only be aggravated by the congestion of the system with conspiracy theories and fake news, aimed at diminishing security awareness of the population and the overall scope of national security agencies. This whole situation is the product of the Covid-19 crisis, and its side-effects of transposing several activities into the online format. A sustainable partnership requires trust above all, a quality that has been mostly reduced in the pandemic context in Central and Eastern Europe. The volatile environment created as a result of the pandemic is a prosperous opportunity for crimes. The many facets of the Covid-19 crisis: joblessness, the rise of violence and conflict, food insecurity, collapse of the health system, constant threats to the integrity of cyberspace would seem to leave no place for progress and investment in youth education about national and individual security. The most harmed aspect of social solidarity is cooperation, a reality seen both at the international and the national level. The European Union had to pass the test of solidarity in its first response to the pandemic, and the most visible result was that some Member States came to direct harsh criticism towards the EU. The anxiety created was quite noticeable, as was the division between north and south public opinion, i.e., high- and low-trust states.

This unsteadiness came to be doubled by another concerning phenomenon in Europe: the rise of the far-right. Romania was no exception, *Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor*, a nationalist formation, having scored 9% in the Parliamentary Elections of December 2020<sup>2</sup>. There have been many assumptions that the result was a mere consequence of the Covid-19 crisis but this theory strikes as far too simplistic. However, advancing a strong nationalist and populist rhetoric has only damaged the efforts at social cohesion, cooperation, and understanding.

### **The way forward: how to “secure” security culture**

Shifting the tone to a more optimistic side, the damage is not irreversible and the future of Romania's security culture and education has not been forever doomed. The mechanisms in place are still functioning and the efforts to build

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Sobers, *134 Cybersecurity Statistics and Trends for 2021*, Varonis, 2021, <https://www.varonis.com/blog/cybersecurity-statistics/>, (29.09.2021)

<sup>2</sup> Stephen McGrath, *How a far-right party came from nowhere to stun Romania in Sunday's election*, Euro News, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/12/08/how-a-far-right-party-came-from-nowhere-to-stun-romania-in-sunday-s-election>, (29.09.2021)

security education in the minds of the Romanian population could only be enhanced by the direct involvement of political dissidents.

Especially in times of crisis, people tend to need a leader and a single voice in official communication a guide through all the insecurity and chaos. The two principles, of *centralized and assumed management* and *unitary communication*, were described in terms of military operation principles, aiming at "a unitary and coherent action, in case of an ab initio application of the single voice principle (unity of command – unity of action)"<sup>1</sup>. Political leaders must assume this role now more than any time, acknowledging the crucial significance of the evolutive process for the future of the nation, pledging to reverse this trend of losing trust in the national authorities. The impact of political figures' actions of promoting not only security culture but security education as well creates a key connection between the leaders and their citizens that is vital for the well-being of the nation.

The development of the academic field in Romania in this sense has been occurring since the end of the communist era, by creating research institutes, special curricula in universities, and increasing the societal role of security institutions. Building a cluster of educated people in the security field would make it difficult for external pressures to succeed. It is to be noted that the context in question refers to the Covid-19 pandemic and the chaotic character it imprinted on society. Nonetheless, certain limitations must not be overlooked -no matter how transparent or open security services may be, their efforts of democratization are somehow limited by their very role. To express a potential change of perspective means referring to the options that were analyzed by academic studies so far, and reinforcing them.

One such option is the *corporate social responsibility theory*<sup>2</sup> which reduces the role of security institutions to the ones that every ordinary organization disables. In this way, security institutions simply need to meet the interests of their stakeholders, in other words, the society. Bringing the security institutions closer to the citizens means redefining public opinion. The incentive shall be made by the political dissidents, as their efforts would, in the end, benefit both parties involved-reduce the pressure on the security system resulted from unconsciously diminishing threat by the population, and the politicians' relation with their voters would take a different shape.

A second approach of reshaping security awareness is *crowdsourcing*<sup>3</sup> (CROSINT), a combination of human intelligence (HUMINT) and open-source intelligence (OSINT). It is a functional method that brings collecting intelligence,

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Lesenciuc, Daniela Nagy, *Role of communication in crisis management* in "International Scientific Conference Defence Resources Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", Braşov, No. 3, 2008, p. 115

<sup>2</sup> Irena Chiru, *Op.cit.*, p. 508

<sup>3</sup> Steven A. Stottlemire, *HUMINT, OSINT, or something new? Defining Crowdsourced Intelligence*, "International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence", Vol. 28, No. 3, 2015, pp.578-589



openness, and effectiveness in one concept. This could be an instrument that also aims at informing people and equally educating them in intelligence and security activities. By better grasping the importance of security and demolishing the public myths of abusiveness of the citizens' private life, the population would not only facilitate security institutions' missions but would also be actively involved in the very process. Reaching cohesion pushes away potential threats and efforts of destabilizing democracies, not to mention the fertile environment created for better policy-making. This could be one of the best efforts at redefining intelligence services as social enterprises<sup>1</sup>.

The third approach concerns *security education*, and how political dissidents (for instance, members of the *Committee for Defense, Public Order and National Security* in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies), especially those that hold security studies shall constantly encourage and determine people to embrace an active role in the discussions about security, take specific courses, participate in seminars, debates, etc. Academia is generally seen as a neutral ground, an independent voice of the society, unlinked to the state institutions, and which values knowledge above all. Considering the numerical criterion, they could be used for the mission of strengthening security education (for example, Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest, Mihai Viteazul National Academy of Intelligence in Bucharest, Ferdinand I Military Technical Academy in Bucharest, West University of Timișoara, Alexandru Ioan Cuza Police Academy in Bucharest, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, Henri Coandă Air Forces Academy in Brașov, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Carol I National Defense University in Bucharest, Mircea cel Bătrân Naval Academy in Constanța, etc.) Two types of activities that could be performed by the institutions which have total or particular competencies in security education are *influence communications* (trying to shift public opinion in a certain direction by enriching citizens with valuable and accurate information), and *public and strategic communication* (constant exchange of messages)<sup>2</sup>. The overall result would undoubtedly be a new image of security services embraced by society, one that is much closer to the truth.

Were political dissidents to fully commit themselves to the purpose of augmenting the level of security education, and implicitly security culture in Romania, the effects that the pandemic has had on the society have a chance to be reversed and the Romanian state would develop a shield against disinformation, cyberattacks, and fake news.

## Conclusions

The pandemic could be easily perceived as an indicator of every society's flaws, or disruptions in the system. The chaos created only encouraged the spread of disinformation, dismantled citizens' trust in public institutions, and eroded the

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<sup>1</sup> Irena Chiru, *Op.cit.*, p. 508

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*

ability of policy-makers to govern in a state of balance and legitimacy. Equally, dangerous vices which have been inherited from the communist years threaten to again disturb the quality of governance in Romania, in the context of the global pandemic.

Through commitment and cooperation on behalf of political dissidents, these contemporary trends could be reversed. The attention shall just be directed towards security culture as a desideratum, a solution to rebuild trust and restore the damaged bond between the decision-makers and the Romanian population. As opinion shapers and academic figures, political dissidents have both the means and the opportunity to push for the achievement of security culture in Romania. In this sense, three instruments were listed as alternatives for political dissidents to achieve such a goal: the *corporate social responsibility theory*, *crowdsourcing*, and *security education* (using the neutral field of the Academia to build trust and provide valuable information).

Hence the problem of the pandemic became rapidly a state credibility and national security issue, and an obstacle for the Romanian politician to formulate and apply policies. As it was labeled in the *National Defense Strategy 2020-2024*, the security culture of decision-makers, and the civil society shall require improvement so that it would stop being a vulnerability exploited by external threats and influences, as we have clearly seen in the case of Covid-19 crisis.

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