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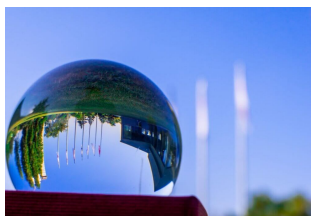
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EDITORIAL

The Evolution of the Current World – Even More Complex as the Confrontation Between the Great Global Powers Escalates

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

„Too many of us don't live our dreams because we live our fears.”

Les Brown

As a result of the profound transformations taking place at regional and global level, of the connections and interactions that are developed between state actors, but also between them and non-state actors, new models of political, economic, military, cultural, informational, social and demographic interdependence come to light, but also new types of international and transnational relations that are analysts often classify as atypical. The transformations taking place at the level of the world order prove to be part of a complex and multispectral process that unfolds in the context of an unprecedented dynamic of state evolutions. However, many of the interaction models of the last 35 years bear the imprint of conflictual logic, receiving, alongside the traditional treatment, in a realistic spirit, another dimension, extracted, either from the reflection of new realities, or from various intellectual speculations and prejudices. It is certain that states acting in such a way led to the confirmation of the fact that multipolarism is a defining problem for the new configuration of the world order and the structure of the international relations system.



Source: <https://www.stimson.org/2024/great-powers-have-lost-the-plot-the-perils-of-a-split-screen-world/>

In the context of the regional and global developments, we can say that 2025 proves more and more that we will talk exclusively about armistices, but not about real peace. The diplomatic offensive has intensified, but all these movements and developments constitute a significant test for an international system incapable of resolving the issues that cause the conflicts that have an accelerated tendency to appear in most regions of the world.

Today's world is characterized by many changing landscapes that redefine long-standing conflicts and a rivalry between regional and global power poles that could turn into trade and technological wars. Fears of increasing unpredictability may appear in the near future and with them, the disappearance of proactive capabilities within international relations. They will gain ground starting with 2025. According to international studies, countries that are experiencing a clear decline in democratic performance far exceed those that manage to advance in this process.

According to the report “The Global State of Democracy 2024”, four out of nine countries are in a worse situation than before in terms of democracy and only about one in four has recorded a quality improvement.

Even though today we are definitely talking about multipolarism by extending power to new international actors (both public and private), with the US now appearing as a great power in retreat, it has become very clear that the world needs to readjust. Global geopolitical balances, and the various conflicts that are wreaking havoc – especially in Ukraine and the Middle East – as well as the fight against climate change or the unpredictable changes of the international order could depend entirely on new leaders at the helm of the countries in the world, many of whom are clearly subjected to an uncertain political transition. This proves that 2025 is the year when diplomatic processes are necessary for geopolitical rebalancing, a process likely to occur in the years to come.

Taking into account the current geopolitical context, it is very clear that we live in a world still affected by disputes generated by the economic and social damage of the various global crises that have taken place in recent years. As a result of recent developments in the economic, social, political, military and security fields, including the medical one, we must admit that we live in a more indebted, more digitalized and more individualistic world, where discordant replicas between the great global powers have gained ground; climate, economic and geopolitical objectives are more and more divergent. The old political, economic, social and cultural fault lines have become more evident: from culture wars to the fight for the control of information, especially those present on social networks used for intense disinformation.

The year 2025 also begins with increasing individualism. We live in a more emotional and less institutional world. If fear and anger is what motivates people when it comes to exercising various rights, including the right to vote, these feelings are ever growing, especially among young people. For example, during the 2024 European elections, there was a decreased voter turnout among people under 25. Only 36% of voters in this age group cast their vote, a 6% decrease in voter turnout compared to the 2019 elections. Out of the young people who did not vote, 28% stated that the main reason was a lack of interest in politics (a higher percentage than the 20% recorded among the adult population as a whole); 14% cited distrust in politics, and 10% believed that their vote would not change anything. Furthermore, according to the Global Solidarity Report, so-called Generation Z¹ feel less like citizens of the world than previous generations, reversing a trend that has been going on for decades. This is true for both rich and poor countries. The report also mentions the failure of international institutions to produce tangible positive impacts (such as reducing carbon emissions or deaths related to various conflicts). The disappointment is mixed with a deep solidarity crisis. People in rich countries are “significantly less likely to support statements of solidarity than those in less rich countries,” and this disregard is especially evident when it comes to choosing whether international bodies should have the right to impose possible solutions.

In such a context, we can say that today’s world is facing many problems generated by:

- The emphasis on ego politics and individualism;
- Acceptance of the armistice, but without the definitive achievement of peace;
- Protectionism and austerity;
- The global dismantling of institutions;
- The clash of technology and the pressure of (de) regulation;
- The emphasis on the trend (now at the level of verbal threats) towards a “third nuclear age”;
- Climate emergencies without a decision-making attitude and collective leadership;
- Gender: the end of consensus;
- Deportations and the rights of migrants;
- The militarization of insecurity.

¹There is no definitive consensus on the exact year of the end of Generation Z, but most sources place the year of birth at the latest in 2012 or 2010. As the first social generation to grow up with access to the Internet and portable digital technology from an early age, members of Generation Z, even if they are not necessarily digitally literate, have been given the label “digital natives”. Furthermore, the negative effects of screen time are most pronounced in adolescents, compared to younger children. Compared to previous generations, members of Generation Z tend to live more slowly than their predecessors at their age, have lower rates of teen pregnancy, and use alcohol (but not necessarily other psychoactive drugs) less frequently. Generation Z teens are more concerned than older generations about academic performance and job prospects, and they are better at delaying gratification than their 1960s counterparts, despite their concerns.

In this context, the accelerated pace of geopolitics raises multiple questions for both analysts and actors in the field of international relations. The world is grappling with a changing landscape that is redefining long-standing conflicts into rivalries that could escalate into a trade and technological war (including in space). Bearing this in mind, the multi-alignment efforts that many countries around the world are trying to make, with security at the forefront, are becoming increasingly complex, as the confrontation between the major global powers escalates.

MOLDOVA AND THE EU



The Long Road of the Republic of Moldova Towards the European Union

PhD. Eng. Cristian-Marcel FELEA (Romania)

On Friday, August 15, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, arrived in Anchorage, Alaska, wearing a sweatshirt with the “USSR” (“СССР”) logo under a padded vest. A clear statement about the real goals, however idealistic and distant they may seem, that animate the Kremlin today. In the name of these goals, the war in Ukraine was started in 2014 and it is for this reason that Vladimir Putin ordered the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 in the hope that within three weeks the flag of the Russian Federation would fly over the central institutions of the Ukrainian state in the capital Kiev.

The Republic of Moldova went through a similar experience – on a different scale, of course, being a state with far fewer resources than Ukraine – between March 2 and July 21, 1992, when the Russian Federation de facto militarily occupied Transnistria in the form of peacekeeping troops. Even today, the Republic of Moldova is territorially divided along the Dniester River, where pro-Kremlin separatism has unilaterally declared the “state of Transnistria.” If the “special operation” launched by Vladimir Putin in February 2022 had succeeded, a “New Russia” would have been created in southern Ukraine, a territory that would have united with the self-declared Transnistrian republic and then demanded integration into the Russian Federation.



Fig. 1 - The Kremlin's “New Russia” plan.

Source: moldova.europalibera.org

offers less than that territory of “New Russia”, in addition to allowing Ukraine to delimit itself de facto and perhaps even de jure, according to international law, from any claim of Moscow, will be a defeat for the Kremlin.

If the Russian Federation obtains Crimea, Lugansk, Donetsk and part of the Kherson and Zaporozhe oblasts as a result of the current war, while the rest of Ukraine becomes a democratic state, part of the European Union, with independence and sovereignty guaranteed by a strong army and European and American troops

stationed on its territory, it is said to be a defeat for the Kremlin. Not necessarily for Russia, on a historical scale.

In similar terms, the Republic of Moldova is fighting to separate from Putin's Russia, to become a truly independent and sovereign state, integrated into the European Union and, at some point, why not, part of NATO's defensive architecture, just like Romania. In the Republic of Moldova, the conflict with Putin's Russia is taking place in hybrid forms, but it is just as ruthless. In this context, the stakes of the parliamentary elections - just like the stakes of the presidential elections and the pro-EU referendum last fall - are huge.

A victory in the elections of pro-European parties in the Republic of Moldova, amid the start of negotiations for an agreement to stop the war in Ukraine that would record the definitive post-conflict separation of Ukraine from Moscow's sphere of influence, would put on hold the objective of "restoring the USSR" as the Kremlin's policy in relation to Europe.

This stake was on the table on Monday, August 18, when seven European leaders, together with Volodymyr Zelensky, explained to US President Donald Trump what the conditions under which the future peace agreement will be negotiated, and why the West must be united and not allow Putin to continue his sphere of influence policy over the European continent.

The same stake could underlie the European Commission's decision to symbolically announce the opening of the first negotiation chapter for the Republic of Moldova's accession to the European Union before the parliamentary elections at the end of September this year.

European Moldova – First Steps

In Chisinau, on July 4th this year, the European Union – Republic of Moldova summit was scheduled, hosted by President Maia Sandu, and distinguished guests were the President of the European Council, António Costa, and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. António Costa and Ursula von der Leyen arrived in Chisinau with the aim of sending a clear political signal of support for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova at a delicate moment, when the accession process is threatened by the blockage generated by the Viktor Orbán government regarding the launch of accession negotiations with Ukraine.

The Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are both seen as potential members of the European Union. However, the Orbán government, citing the results of an opinion poll – "Voks 2025", an operation carried out between April 14 and June 20, 2025¹ - promised to block Ukraine's accession to the European Union; implicitly, the start of accession negotiations of the Republic of Moldova is at a standstill.

The Republic of Moldova has parliamentary elections scheduled for September 28, 2025, so Viktor Orbán is fully serving the Kremlin's cause, playing into its hands both in Ukraine, with which Russia is at war, and in the Republic of Moldova, where part of the pro-Russian opposition has decreed that accession to the European Union will never occur, in any case, not before unification with the Russian Federation.

At the European Council on June 26-27 this year, Viktor Orbán informed the other 26 leaders of the member states that Hungary opposes the start of accession negotiations with the European Union. He invoked the result of the "Voks 2025" opinion poll. On the official "Voks 2025" page, a text published on July 27, this year² says that "According to the Prime Minister, over 2 million votes in the 'Voks 2025' public consultation gave the Hungarian government a democratic mandate to oppose the opening of accession chapters with Ukraine". Prime Minister V. Orbán stressed that EU accession talks can only continue with unanimity among member states. "We did not agree," he said, stating unequivocally that the process has now been stopped.

"There are no objective reasons to prevent the start of the process of Ukraine's accession to the European Union," the European Commission responded to the Hungarian Prime Minister's claims³. "When a candidate country is blocked from joining the European Union without an objective reason, despite the fact that it meets the criteria, the entire enlargement process loses its credibility."

In essence, the Hungarian Prime Minister's veto has no legal basis, as it leads one to believe. Between April 14 and June 20, 2025, a kind of opinion poll was conducted, in which Hungarian citizens were asked to state whether or not they agreed with Ukraine's accession to the European Union. Before the actual launch of the poll and during its conduct, an intense campaign was carried out in which the electorate was asked/suggested to do two things: (i) to participate in the poll in as many numbers as possible; (ii) to vote NO, as it was in the country's interest to do so, in order to avoid a conflict with Russia.

¹<https://abouthungary.hu/tags/voks-2025>.

²<https://abouthungary.hu/blog/pm-orban-with-2-million-votes-in-voks-2025-we-stopped-ukraines-eu-accession>.

³<https://www.euronews.ro/articole/bruxelles-raspuns-pentru-viktor-orban-nu-exista-motive-obiective-pentru-a-bloca-a>.

In the end, the Orbán government reported that 2.278 million eligible voters – around 29% of the eligible electorate – took part in the survey, of which 95% voted as the government wanted, i.e. against starting the process of negotiating Ukraine's accession to the European Union. From which, by extrapolation, the government considered that there was a legal basis for an official mandate to express a veto in the European Council.

The opposition in Budapest denounces this dishonorable political game. The consultation process was not monitored in any way by independent observers, does not offer guarantees for multiple voting, and has not been open to any independent audit, although its results are invoked as a legal basis in international law. Péter Magyar accused the entire process of being a huge pro-Russian propaganda exercise, directed against Ukraine and undermining the interests of the European Union. Needless to say, the Republic of Moldova seems to have become a collateral victim of V. Orbán's pro-Putinism and Euroscepticism.

Ukraine is paying with open war for its attempt to join the West. The Republic of Moldova cannot hope that Russia is willing to accept without opposing with all its might its European path. The next attempt is related to the parliamentary elections of September 28 this year, when Moscow hopes to isolate Maia Sandu and the presidential administration and then to besiege it with a pro-Russian victory in September. Pro-Russian politicians, the media and pro-Russian social media accounts claim that the European Union is not interested in having the Republic of Moldova as a member. It is an impactful narrative, in the Republic of Moldova as in Romania. The European Union – Republic of Moldova summit was attended by António Costa and Ursula von der Leyen, Maia Sandu, then the President of the Parliament, Igor Grosu, and Prime Minister Dorin Recean. The objectives of the meeting were in principle the following: (a) Support for the European path of the Republic of Moldova; (b) Strengthening cooperation in the field of security and defence; (c) Supporting the effort of economic development and infrastructure; (d) An agreement for roaming from 2026 and facilitating access to Union programs such as "Erasmus+" or "Creative Europe".

At the end of the meeting, the joint declaration of the first European Union – Republic of Moldova summit was made public, and President Maia Sandu summarized in her statement the results of this first political meeting:

"In the next three years, the European Union will invest 1.9 billion euros in Moldova – from north to south, in cities and villages. From the first tranche of European funds, we will repair approximately 200 kilometers of regional and district roads. The works will start in several localities in the country (...). In over 100 localities, local roads that have been waiting for decades to be repaired will be asphalted (...). Schools across the country will receive support to renovate their canteens, so that, from September 1st 2025, students in grades 5 and 9 will benefit from free meals. We will support entrepreneurs through grants and financing programs that help them invest, develop their businesses and create jobs."⁴

We recall that last year, on October 20, a referendum was held on the start of negotiations for the Republic of Moldova's accession to the European Union, which passed the limit, with 50.38%. The whole game is on a knife's edge, because the pro-Russian opposition, if it comes to power, will not hesitate to do the same as in Georgia, putting the process on hold indefinitely. However, as long as V. Orbán plays the Kremlin's game and blocks the start of accession negotiations, Brussels, until it finds the antidote to Budapest's subversive actions, can only come with offers of financial support and promises. It is not little, of course, but the results remain uncertain in the fight against Russian propaganda. As a concrete measure, this year the Union will allocate the first tranche of 270 million euros out of the 1.9 billion euros announced as support for the Republic of Moldova.

Beyond certainties, there are also rumors about the decoupling of the Republic of Moldova from Ukraine – imposed by the realities of the different fate of the two states that were part of the Soviet Union in the 20th century, against their will – in engaging in accession negotiations with the European Union. While Orbán's Hungary makes a point of pride in blocking accession negotiations with Kiev, three diplomats and a European official have accredited to "Politico" the fact that before September 28 – the date of the parliamentary elections – an informal meeting of the Union's foreign ministers could decide to open the EU-Republic of Moldova accession negotiations on a first set of negotiation chapters⁵.

The Russian Danger, Greater than Ever

The "WatchDog.MD" community identified a network of 910 accounts on all the mentioned

⁴<https://cursdeguvernare.ro/declaratia-summit-ului-ue-moldova-ue-a-debloca-270-mil-euro-din-srijinul-de-19-mld-promis-moldovei-liderii-europeni-condamna-amenintarile-hibride-persistente-ale-rusiei-de-subminare-a-alegerilor.html>.

⁵<https://www.dw.com/ro/moldova-avans-fa%C8%9B%C4%83-de-ucraina-%C3%AE-n-procesul-de-aderare-la-ue/a-73648811>.

platforms, which distribute Russian propaganda narratives, attack the European Union, the European integration process of Moldova, democratic processes and pro-European leaders in Chisinau⁶.

The propaganda network had the role of amplifying the manipulative messages of pro-Russian politicians and parties in Moldova. Among the most cited network politicians were: (i) Victoria Furtună - former prosecutor, included in the EU sanctions list for attempts to destabilize the Republic of Moldova; (ii) George Simion - leader of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians party (Bucharest); (iii) Eugenia Guțul - governor of Gagauzia, included in the EU and US sanctions' list for attempts to destabilize the Republic of Moldova; (iv) Ilan Șor - the fugitive oligarch, protected by Moscow, included in the international sanctions list of several states for attempts to destabilize the Republic of Moldova; (v) Călin Georgescu - former candidate for the position of President of Romania, known for promoting extremist, conspiratorial ideas and for approaching pro-Kremlin circles; (vi) Ion Ceban - mayor of Chisinau, supported by the FSB in the elections for the position of mayor in 2019, banned from the Schengen area because it would represent a danger to Romania's national security. A special role in the propaganda network is played by the Orthodox Church of Moldova (Metropolitan Church of Moldova), affiliated with the Russian Patriarchate. The propaganda network used the image of the church to disseminate messages against European values and the LGBT community. The most promoted church figure by the network was the Bishop of Balti and Falesti, Marchel, known for his pro-Kremlin position and support for pro-Russian politicians⁷. In a recent statement, Prime Minister Dorin Recean said that Russia continues its efforts to destabilize the Republic of Moldova through massive disinformation: "Democracy can be lost not only with tanks, but with millions of euros pumped into anonymous advertising accounts, with pocket media platforms, including those founded directly in Moscow, with influencers paid to lie. The Russian bank has opened over 138,000 accounts for citizens of the Republic of Moldova to transfer money to voters. Criminal groups, malign actors from abroad are increasingly trying to exploit and abuse the laws on which democracy is based."⁸

After the last parliamentary elections, the authorities in Chisinau adopted a new electoral code with stricter rules on party financing: a reduced ceiling for donations, a ban on financing from entities with foreign interests, and a limitation on cash donations. The presidential elections in October 2024 in the Republic of Moldova and the critical situation that Romania went through at the end of last year, when it was forced to cancel the presidential elections due to Russian interference, but could not do anything against the propaganda on social networks that massively influenced the vote in the parliamentary elections in December 2024, are the lessons learned by the Dorin Recean government. But Russia's pressure on the Republic of Moldova is also intensifying accordingly.

The spearhead of the Kremlin's policy in the Republic of Moldova is still the fugitive oligarch, Ilan Șor. On Sunday, July 6, Ilan Șor organized a congress of the "Victory" Bloc, the political party he patronizes. The meeting was attended by several politicians associated with Șor's interests: the mayor of Taraclia, Veaceslav Lupov, the mayor of Orhei, Tatiana Cociu, the deputy Vasile Bolea, as well as Marina Tauber, who left the Republic of Moldova, where she has problems with the law.⁹

Political party	The main actors	Orientation	Joint
Governance	"Together" political Bloc	Pro-European Democratic	DA Platform, Party of Change and Green Ecological Party
Classic parliamentary opposition	PSRM, PCRM independent	Socialists and communists, pro-Russian or at least eurosceptic, Moldovanism	Concurrence
"Victory" Bloc	The Șor Bloc is made up of political vehicles created by Ilan Șor, under the patronage of Russia	Pro-Russian; propose unification of the Republic of Moldova with the Russian Federation	The parties Renaissance, Chance, Victory and the Alternative Force for the Salvation of Moldova

⁶<https://www.report.md/stiri-online/rusia-a-activat-o-masinarie-de-propaganda-online-mesajele-lui-simion-si-georgescu-amplificate-74700>
⁷*Ibidem*.

⁸<https://www.romania-actualitati.ro/stiri/in-lume/chisinaul-este-decis-sa-nu-lase-moscova-sa-hotarasca-viitorul-republicii-moldova-id213346.html>.

⁹<https://www.ziarulnational.md/ilan-or-propune-uniunea-cu-rusia-ca-solutie-pentru-salvarea-moldovei-inainte-de-alegerile-din-septembrie/>.

“Alternative” Bloc	The National Alternative Movement, the Party for the Development and Consolidation of Moldova, the Civic Congress and Alexandr Stoianoglo	Allegedly nationalist and pro-European	The party leaders, Ion Ceban, Ion Chicu, Mark Tkaciuc and Alexandr Stoianoglo are opportunists, allegedly pro-European, but also willing to collaborate with Moscow
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Fig. 2 - Simplified diagram of the political equation in the Republic of Moldova

The “Victory” bloc - also created in Moscow, on April 21, 2024 - includes the parties “Renaissance“, “Chance”, “Victory” and “Alternative Force for the Salvation of Moldova” - all closely linked to the oligarch Ilan Șor and, implicitly, to Russia. It is just one part of the complicated political equation in Chisinau, which has artificially diversified - just like the one in Romania - under the pressure of the objectives of the hybrid war waged by Russia against the West.

Recently, the League of Cities and Communes of the Republic of Moldova announced that it is leaving the “Together” political Bloc, emphasizing that it will participate separately in the parliamentary elections on September 28, this year. The reason? “The bloc, which was supposed to offer a real alternative to citizens disappointed with the government, has been transformed into an isolated political instrument, where dialogue and expansion have been replaced by procrastination, labeling and backstage games,” said Alexandru Bujorean, leader of the League of Cities and Communes¹⁰. Last year, in August, the Coalition for Unity and Welfare also left the “Together” Bloc, with Igor Munteanu, the leader of the Coalition, accusing The Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) of monopolistic tendencies of control.

Recently interviewed by the Romanian press (see here), Nicolae Țibrigan, an expert in Russian disinformation, pointed Ion Ceban, the mayor of Chisinau, as the real pro-Kremlin pawn. Further, regarding the modus operandi of the multitude of political formations that are trying to come to power in September 2025 to keep the Republic of Moldova close to Russia and away from integration into the European Union, Nicolae Țibrigan offered the following explanation: “Parties with an anti-European agenda in the Republic of Moldova operate in an increasingly coordinated and sophisticated way to fragment the pro-European vote, relying on a double mechanism: the proliferation of satellite formations and the instrumentalization of religious and identity discourse. Unlike classic opposition strategies, these groups – PSRM, PCRM, the “Victory” bloc, the “Alternative” bloc, Ilan Șor’s reconstituted structures, such as the “Heart of Moldova” Party, or the “Future of Moldova” Party – assume an electoral logic of “fan coverage”, each of them being calibrated to attract a certain category of undecided, disappointed or trapped in conservative, anti-system information bubbles. For example, in the south of the country or in the eastern diaspora, the idea is promoted that the EU would “impose foreign and LGBT values”, while in urban areas they rely on discourses about poverty, national betrayal or the corruption of the current government. All these narratives converge, in fact, towards a single objective: demobilizing PAS voters and dispersing moderate votes by creating “alternative options” that, de facto, support Russian interests.”

Furthermore, when it comes to Ion Ceban, Nicolae Țibrigan believes that, due to his past, but also his political profile and the actions he carries out, he is the character with the best chance of coming to power, in order to then openly serve Moscow’s interests:

“Although he enjoys an image of an efficient mayor in Chisinau, Ceban has not managed to consolidate his political profile at the national level, and his association with the Kremlin, supported by some data and media appearances, is still causing him great distress. It is, however, obvious that mayor Ceban cultivates an ambivalent rhetoric, avoiding direct confrontations with Russia and promoting a “pragmatic neutrality”, aimed at the conservative and undecided electorate. His presence at events with actors close to Moscow, public statements about “balanced” relations with the East and the lack of a clear positioning in the past towards

¹⁰<https://adevarul.ro/stiri-externe/republica-moldova/tensiuni-in-blocul-impreuna-inainte-de-2455977.html>.

the Russian aggression in Ukraine have fueled the perception that he is a convenient vector for Russian interests, without actually admitting to being an agent. At the same time, the Russian press presents him favorably, and some Telegram channels associated with the networks “Pravda” and “Matrioshka” have distributed materials in which Ceban is portrayed as the “only balanced politician” in Moldova. This double positioning – between administrative efficiency and geopolitical ambiguity – makes Ceban a potentially useful candidate for the Kremlin, but also vulnerable to political attacks accusing him of opportunism. The Romanian public, including our politicians, must understand that Ion Ceban is a “Russian politician” in the strict sense, including being one of the main beneficiaries of a Russian narrative that seeks to discredit Chisinau’s pro-European orientation and promote a hybrid model of governance, to Moscow’s liking.

The Supreme Court of Justice in Chisinau issued a decision the other day according to which the political parties “Chance”, “Alternative Force for the Salvation of Moldova” and “Victory” in the early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova - all three part of the political bloc of fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor - were excluded from the electoral competition¹¹. The decision of the Supreme Court of Justice is irrevocable and produces immediate legal effects.

But Blood Is Thicker than Water

Pro-European Chisinau cannot cope with the continuous pressure from Russia alone. The Kremlin has not given up on the attempt to conquer Odessa, which would be annexed, like the other four Ukrainian oblasts, to the Russian Federation. Odessa is a key Ukrainian territory, the conquest of which would bring the Russian Federation to the mouths of the Danube and would allow Transnistria to demand integration into the Federation. The Republic of Moldova and Romania would have an enemy on the Dniester and Danube, an enemy that would never cease to be provocative in every possible way, including on a military level.



Fig.3 - Maia Sandu and Nicusor Dan at the “Wolves Festival”, Orheiul Vechi.

Source: spotmedia.ro¹²

With this perspective in mind, the question arises whether Romania should continue the timid policy of President Iohannis regarding the Republic of Moldova, or should it act much more openly and decisively? When the enemy is at the gates, but has also consolidated inside, precautions no longer find their purpose, except to explain the lack of determination and various weaknesses or betrayals. Recently, both the interim president, today Prime Minister Ilie Bolojan, and the newly elected president Nicusor Dan visited Chisinau. In his statements on June 10, 2019, during his visit to

Chisinau, President Nicusor Dan said¹³: “... Romania supports your efforts, both diplomatically, in relation to our partners, more specifically, to the extent that, in certain areas, our expertise is needed, meaning that all the mistakes we have made over time are included in the expertise. The greatest present threat, obviously, is the Russian Federation. Apart from the war in Ukraine, which generates insecurity throughout the area, we must be very careful and have common means of responding to hybrid warfare, and we spoke today about collaboration in this direction. As I said, the most important project of the Republic of Moldova is accession to the European Union, you have our support here. An important stage is coming, September 28. I am very optimistic that, as they have done several times in the recent period, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova will have the civic spirit necessary to preserve the European direction that the Republic of Moldova has built”.

¹¹<https://ziare.com/alegeri-parlamentare/partide-oligarh-rus-fugar-ilan-sor-exclude-alegeri-parlamentare-republica-moldova-1959633>.

¹² <https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/opinii-si-analize/ce-a-cautat-nicusor-dan-langa-maia-sandu>.

¹³<https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/declaratii-de-presa/conferinta-de-presa-comuna-a-presedintelui-romaniei-cu-presedintele-republicii-moldova-maia-sandu>.

The September elections are knocking at the door. There is no time to waste. Bucharest and Chisinau must act synergistically, to prevent at all costs, together with the institutions of the European Union, the establishment of a puppet government supported by Moscow in Chisinau. There is also an obvious obstacle that must be removed in one way or another: Orbán's boycott that serves Putin's interests in Ukraine and implicitly affects the Republic of Moldova. Romania must become much more active in supporting the Republic of Moldova in Brussels and must do it now.

MOLDOVA AND TRANSNISTRIA



The Role of Transnistria in the Political Evolution of the Republic of Moldova

George-Vadim TIUGEA (Romania)

The existence of the Republic of Moldova as an independent state was marked, from its very beginnings, by the manifestation of the armed and then “frozen” conflict in the Transnistrian area, encompassing the districts on the left bank of the Dniester, as well as the city of Tighina (Bender) on the right bank of the Dniester, a historical landmark of the medieval Moldovan state.

While the independence movement in Chisinau capitalized on the moments of decline and dissolution of the Soviet Union, conservative pro-Soviet elements sought to maintain ties with Moscow, including claiming the initial pro-Romanian attitude of the independence movement, which could result in a possible return of the territory between the Prut and Dniester to the borders of Romania, as in the interwar period.

Under these circumstances, pro-Soviet groups on the left bank of the Dniester proclaimed the independence of the so-called “Transnistrian Moldavian Republic”, which sought to remain under Moscow’s sovereignty, rejecting the authority of the new regime in Chisinau. The attempt

by the Moldovan authorities to regain control over the secessionist area was repulsed with the help of Russian troops stationed on the left bank of the Dniester. Following diplomatic interventions by the international community (including Romania), Moscow adopted a mediatory position in the conflict, supporting the cease-fire, but in fact tacitly supporting the separatist regime in Tiraspol.



Source: <https://www.prevail-partners.com/thematic-report-transnistrias-role-in-the-russian-ukraine-conflict/>

Moscow's interest in keeping the Transnistrian conflict in a "frozen" phase was subordinated to the broader strategy of the Russian Federation to maintain its influence in the ex-Soviet space, materialized by the establishment of organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), but also by assuming the role of mediator of post-Soviet conflicts (including Transnistria), including by maintaining armed forces under the aegis of the UN in the respective areas. In this way, the Russian state maintained important bridgeheads for the eventuality that the respective states would have tried to emancipate themselves from its influence and choose ways of development together with Western structures (EU, NATO). The Transnistrian conflict thus became a way to keep the Republic of Moldova prisoner of a special relationship with Russia and away from integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. When Chisinau managed to overcome its condition of subordination to Moscow, even becoming an associated state of the EU, the Russian state began to show signs that it would like the Transnistrian crisis to re-heat, thus creating new problems for the political evolution of the Moldovan state.

Regional Context

The conflicts in the former Soviet states have often been called "frozen conflicts" because their development was slowed down by the intervention of Russia and other significant international actors, which led to the preservation of the situation that existed at a certain point, characterized by the relative balance of forces on the ground and the coexistence of the newly independent states and separatist structures. The most important effect of these conflicts was the consolidation of separatist entities in the form of "pseudo-states", which presented three of the attributes of sovereign states, according to the Montevideo Convention of 1933, namely a permanent population, a well-defined territory and a government. The problem with these pseudo-states is that their sovereignty is not recognized by other states, which calls into question their legitimacy at the international level¹. In contrast, each of these pseudo-states (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transnistrian Moldavian Republic) enjoyed the more or less tacit support of Russia to preserve their existence for a significant period of time. Also, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh (until 2022), South Ossetia and Transnistria support each other by mutual recognition of their sovereignty over the titular states². With the passage of time, the independence of these entities is consolidated by the confluence of interests between the local (ex-Soviet) political and economic elites, military structures, organized crime, which profits from the lack of regulation of the situation of the respective territories at the international level³, and Russia, which takes advantage of the situation to consolidate its position in the ex-Soviet space⁴.

The post-Soviet conflicts have developed, not by chance, in the Black Sea region, a very important strategic area for Russia, but also for the enlarged European Union. Most of them concern the difference in the choice of the secessionist regimes compared to the pro-Western orientation of the post-Soviet states (Transnistria compared to the Republic of Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia compared to Georgia). Each conflict has its own particularities, stemming mainly from the local situation, but also from the way of relating to Moscow. The way in which the latter relates to them, as a great protecting power, constitutes a serious obstacle to the development of relations with the European Union as a whole.

Brief History of the Initial Conflict in Transnistria

The Moldovan-Transnistrian military conflict was triggered in the spring of 1992, following the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Moldova from the Soviet Union on August 27, 1991. Although the USSR dissolved itself at the end of December 1991, local leaders on the left bank of the Dniester, helped by a series of contingents of Soviet military forces (the former 14th Army), proclaimed the independence of the territory generically called Transnistria (officially, the "Transnistrian Moldavian Republic"), claiming the alleged intention of the new authorities in Chisinau to unite with Romania. This would have threatened, in the view of the leaders in Tiraspol, the predominant Russian-speaking population on the left bank of the Dniester⁵.

¹Dov Lynch, "Managing separatist states: a Eurasian Case Studies" in *Occasional Papers*, 32, Institute for Security Studies – Western European Union, Brussels, November 2001, p. 4; Galina M. Yemelianova, "Western academic discourse on the post-Soviet de facto state phenomenon" in *Caucasus Survey, International Association for the Study of Caucasus*, 2015, p. 3.

²Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States" in *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 4, July 2001, pp. 542-543.

³Walter A. Kemp, "The Business of Ethnic Conflict" in *Security Dialogue*, vol. 35, no. 43, 2004, pp. 43-59.

⁴King, loc. cit., pp. 525-529; Lynch, loc. cit., pp. 4-8.

⁵Natalia Cojocaru, "Nationalism and identity in Transnistria" in *Innovation*, vol. 19, Nr. 3-4, 2006, pp. 261-272.

In reality, the ethnic composition of Transnistria was much more complex, being composed, according to the 1989 census, of Moldovans (39.9%), Ukrainians (28.3%), Russians (25.5%) and other nationalities (Bulgarians, Gagauzians, Belarusians, etc.) for a total population of 679,000 inhabitants⁶. Subsequently, the 2004 census confirmed the ethnic fragmentation of the region, between Moldovans/Romanians (32.04%), Russians (30.37%), Ukrainians (28.82%), Bulgarians (2.50%), etc., for a total population of 555,000 inhabitants⁷. At the same time, however, the Russian language did indeed constitute the community language in the Transnistrian region, alongside the Romanian language written in Cyrillic script (called “Moldovan”, according to Soviet tradition). In order to gain the support of the Ukrainian community, the Tiraspol regime declared Ukrainian the third official language of the region. Another important detail is the fact that a significant number of Transnistrian citizens hold the citizenship of another state, mainly Russia (32%), Ukraine (21%) or even Romania (uncertain percentage, estimated at no more than 10%)⁸.

The military conflict opposed the Transnistrian separatist forces, supported by the Russian forces of the former 14th Army, led by General Alexandr Lebed, and the new armed and police forces of the Republic of Moldova. According to some Russian sources, the Transnistrian side was supported by Russian and Ukrainian volunteers, while the Moldovan side was supported by Romanian volunteers and military experts⁹.

The objective of the Tiraspol regime was recognition by Moscow and, eventually, integration into the Russian Federation. The Chisinau regime, rejecting the accusations of the Transnistrian side that it was seeking unification with Romania, supported the need to maintain the territorial integrity of the new Moldovan state and rejected the secessionist claims of Transnistria (and also of the Gagauzia region in the southwest of its territory). Also, the Russian troops on the left bank of the Dniester were considered occupation troops¹⁰.

The authorities in Moscow openly encouraged the secession of Transnistria, including through high-ranking officials such as Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi, who on 5 April 1992 supported Transnistria's independence in a speech delivered during a visit to Tiraspol. As a result, armed clashes between the two camps continued, resulting in the deaths of over 3,000 people, including 637 civilians, and approximately 100,000 refugees. Both sides suffered territorial losses, the most significant of which was the capture by Transnistrian forces of the city of Tighina (Bender) on the right bank of the Dniester River¹¹.

The international community, including the member states of the European Union, condemned the conduct of the Moldovan-Transnistrian hostilities and put pressure, including on the Russian side (through the OSCE), to peacefully resolve the dispute. Following diplomatic negotiations between Russia and the Republic of Moldova, an armistice was signed on 21 June 1992 between Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Moldovan President Mircea Snegur. It provided for the deployment of peacekeeping forces in the form of five Russian battalions, three Moldovan battalions and two Transnistrian battalions, under the coordination of the Unified Control Commission (UCC). In fact, the majority of Russian peacekeeping forces came from the former 14th Army, and their main role was to maintain the Transnistrian separatist regime. The latter also benefited from the presence of Moldova's main industrial facilities (including the arms industry) on the territory to the left of the Dniester¹².

The Evolution of Relations between Chisinau and the Transnistrian Separatist Regime (1992-2001)

However, Moscow's position was not entirely identical to that of the Tiraspol regime, especially regarding the official recognition of Transnistria's independence and its integration into the Russian Federation. From this point of view, Russia preferred to use Transnistria to hinder the pro-Western evolution of the Republic of Moldova. Thus, the influence of the Russian side was translated into encouraging political forces in

⁶John C. Dewdney, “Population change in the Soviet Union, 1979-1989” in *Geography*, Vol. 75, Pt. 3, No. 328, July 1990, pp. 273-277.

⁷Pridnestrovie, “2004 Census: PMR urban, multilingual, multicultural” in <http://pridnestrovie.net/2004census.html>, accessed on December 26, 2021.

⁸Deutsche Welle, “Transnistria: Russia's satellite state an open wound in Eastern Europe”, 28 May 2019, in <https://www.dw.com/en/transnistria-russias-satellite-state-an-open-wound-in-eastern-europe/a-48942598>, accessed on December 27, 2021.

⁹Dmitry Ofitserov-Belskiy, Andrey Sushenstov, “Directions: Central and Eastern Europe” in Andrei P. Tsygankov (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, Routledge, New York, 2018, p. 286.

¹⁰Anatolie Muntean, Nicolae Ciubotaru, Războiul de pe Nistru, Ager-Economistul, București, 2004, p. 451.

¹¹Pal Kolsto, Andrei Edemsky, Natalya Kalashnikova, “The Dniester Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism” in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6, 1993, p. 973-1000.

¹²Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, “Moldova and the Transnistrian Conflict” in Bruno Coppieters, Michael Emerson, Michel Huysseune, Tamara Kozviridze, Gergana Noutcheva, *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution. Case Studies from the European Periphery*, Academia Press, Gent, 2004, pp. 156-157; Popescu, op. cit., p. 75.

Chisinau opposed to privileged relations or union with Romania, such as the Democratic Agrarian Party of Moldova (PDAM), the main ruling party between 1994 and 1998. Under the leadership of the PDAM, formed mostly by former members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the 1994 Constitution was adopted, which provided, among other things, the existence of a Moldovan identity distinct from the Romanian one (manifested by the so-called “Moldovan language”), the country’s neutrality towards Romania and Russia, privileged relations with the ex-Soviet countries within the CIS and the maintenance of the Russian language as a means of inter-community communication¹³. Taking advantage of the improvement of relations with Russia, in 1997, the authorities in Chisinau and the separatist regime in Tiraspol signed the “Memorandum on the Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria” (called the *Primakov Memorandum*), which provided for the maintenance of a unitary state, based on five common spaces of cooperation between the two parties, a document that, however, had no concrete consequences¹⁴.

The change of political power in Chisinau in 1998 and the formation of the pro-Western alliance resulted in the worsening of relations with Moscow and the blocking of dialogue with the Transnistrian side. At the same time, the government in Chisinau managed, with the support of Romania, to draw the attention of the international community to the Transnistrian conflict, especially to the role of Transnistria in consolidating international routes for trafficking in arms, cigarettes, people and drugs. Thus, in March 1998, the two sides signed, under the auspices of the OSCE, together with representatives of Russia and Ukraine, the *Odessa Agreement* on Confidence-Building Measures and Development of Contacts, which provided for the reduction of peacekeeping forces and military equipment stationed in the area¹⁵. In 1999, at the OSCE summit in Istanbul, European states demanded that Russia withdraw most of its troops from Transnistria. Although Moscow initially promised to comply with the request by the end of 2002, this did not happen. It was not until 2004 that some of the military equipment was evacuated through Ukraine¹⁶.

The accession to power of the pro-Russian Moldovan communists in 2001 led to a new reorientation of Chisinau’s policy towards the east. At the same time, negotiations mediated by the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine led to the emergence of a preliminary peace plan in July 2002, which provided for the federalization of Moldova, in order to reintegrate Transnistria¹⁷. However, President Vladimir Voronin, a follower of the Moldovan current, refused, in November 2003, to sign the so-called “*Kozak Plan*” for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, proposed by Moscow, through which the separatist region was created multiple conditions to separate from the territory of the Republic of Moldova and to declare its independence or membership in another state, and Russian troops could remain on the territory of the country for another 20 years¹⁸. This event marked the beginning of the new external orientation of the Republic of Moldova, towards a closer relationship with the European Union.

Another option for resolving the conflict was the *Yushchenko Plan*, proposed by the new President of Ukraine in May 2005, which provided for the autonomy of Transnistria within the Republic of Moldova and the organization of free elections in both parts. Based on this plan, the Moldovan parliament adopted, in July 2005, the *Law on the Status of Autonomy of Transnistria within the Republic of Moldova*, which mentioned Transnistria as an Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU) with a special status, similar to that of the ATU Gagauz. The Tiraspol regime did not agree to this proposal, but since 2005 negotiations for the settlement of the conflict have been conducted in the 5+2 format (Moldova, Transnistria, Ukraine, OSCE and Russia, plus the EU and the United States as external observers)¹⁹. Also, since 2006, Ukraine has conditioned the import of goods from Transnistria on the issuance of customs documents by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, in an attempt to limit smuggling originating from this region²⁰.

The cooling of relations between Chisinau and Moscow led to the accentuation of the secessionism of

¹³Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 2000, pp. 159-160.

¹⁴OSCE, “Memorandum on the Basis for Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria”, 8 May 1997, in <https://www.osce.org/moldova/42309>, accessed on December 22, 2021; Vahl, Emerson, loc. cit., pp. 160-161.

¹⁵Idem, “Odessa Agreement”, 20 March 1998, in <https://www.osce.org/moldova/42310>, accessed on December 22, 2021.

¹⁶Vahl, Emerson, loc. cit., pp. 163-162.

¹⁷Vahl, Emerson, loc. cit., pp. 162-164; Constantin Lupu, “Diferendul transnistrean și federalizarea Republicii Moldova”, martie 2004, in http://www.arhiva.cadranpolitic.ro/view_article.asp?item=1368, accessed on December 22, 2021.

¹⁸Oazu Nantoi, “Playing with the statehood and future of the Republic of Moldova as an apprentice wizard” in Iulian Chifu, Oazu Nantoi, Oleksandr Sushko, *The Breakthrough Crisis of a Quick Solution in Transnistria*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2008, p. 93; Vahl, Emerson, loc. cit., pp. 170-174; Popescu, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

¹⁹Liliana Popescu, “The futility of the negotiations on Transnistria” in *European Journal of Science and Theology*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 115-126; Radu Vrabie, “Problema transnistreană și integrarea europeană a Moldovei. Rolul UE” in *Buletin APE, Chișinău*, 2010, p. 8.

²⁰Nantoi, loc. cit., pp. 94, 96, 98-101; Popescu, op. cit., p. 76.

the Tiraspol regime, which organized, in September 2006, a referendum through which 97.2% of the population of the region voted for independence and association with the Russian Federation. The referendum was not recognized by either the EU or even by Russia²¹. At the same time, Romania's granting of Romanian citizenship to Moldovan citizens began to become a point of attraction for the Transnistrian population, especially after Romania's accession to the EU, which offered the possibility of unrestricted movement within the EU.²²

The Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 was welcomed by the Tiraspol regime. It hoped that, after recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia would also recognize the independence of Transnistria. This did not happen, however, as Russia preferred to support pro-Russian political groups in Chisinau and keep the Moldovan-Transnistrian conflict frozen. The formation of a new pro-European coalition in Chisinau in August 2009 further distanced the two sides from the conflict. Russia began to threaten Chisinau with a reduction in natural gas supplies²³.

At the same time, the European Union began to take a greater interest in the situation in the region, as demonstrated by the opening of an EU office in Chisinau and the appointment of an EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Republic of Moldova in October 2005, within the EUBAM mission²⁴. In 2010, negotiations began for the adoption of an Association Agreement between the two parties, including a deep and comprehensive free trade area. The Association Agreement was signed in November 2013 and was complemented by visa liberalization for Moldovan citizens three months later. This generated increased interest from citizens and companies in Transnistria (especially the *Sheriff* consortium, led by oligarch Victor Gușan, which dominates the local economy), who began to apply in increasing numbers for Moldovan citizenship and register in the Republic of Moldova, in order to have access to the European market. Currently, it is estimated that no less than two-thirds of the 469,000 inhabitants of Transnistria (2015) hold Moldovan citizenship²⁵.

The annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Donbas in 2014 also influenced the situation in Transnistria. Some analysts considered that Transnistria could become a bridgehead for a more extensive Russian intervention in eastern and southern Ukraine (*Novorossiia*), which would aim to gain full control over the northern Black Sea coast, from the mouths of the Danube to Abkhazia²⁶. This has not happened to date, even after Russia's military intervention in Ukraine (2022), although the Tiraspol regime continues to desire to join Russia, despite economic developments that increasingly connect the business environment in Transnistria to the Republic of Moldova and the EU market. Russia preferred to continue encouraging a type of soft power policy through which it would determine the orientation of the Republic of Moldova towards its own cooperation structures, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, in which Moldova has observer status.

The election of Igor Dodon, the pro-Russian socialist candidate, as president in 2016 seemed to represent a success of Moscow's policy of regaining support from Chisinau²⁷. Dodon's failure to outline a pro-Russian orientation for the country, in the context in which the Moldovan socialists' one-time allies (the Democrats and PAS) remained pro-European, highlighted the limits of Moscow's influence in Chisinau. At the same time, the rise of Maia Sandu, who became president of the country after the 2020 elections, and of her party (PAS), which became the majority after the legislative elections in the spring of 2021²⁸, highlighted the greater influence of the EU on the Republic of Moldova, whose status as an associated state of the EU was reconfirmed.

Conclusions

Despite the drafting of a multitude of plans for the settlement of the separatist conflict in the Republic

²¹Stuart Hensel, "Moldova Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA)", prepared for the UK Global Conflict Prevention Pool, November 2006, in [http://www.peacebuilding.md/library/153/en/Moldova Strategic Conflict Assessment 2006.pdf](http://www.peacebuilding.md/library/153/en/Moldova%20Strategic%20Conflict%20Assessment%202006.pdf), accessed on December 27, 2021.

²²Alina Radu, "Education and Information – the golden passport for young Transnistrians", September 26, 2019, in <https://fpc.org.uk/education-and-information-the-golden-passport-for-young-transnistrians/>, accessed on December 26, 2021.

²³EU Observer, "Russian gas battles EU free trade for future of Moldova" in EU Observer, 14.12.2010, <http://euobserver.com/24/31497>, accessed on December 20, 2010.

²⁴Nantoi, loc. cit., p. 105; Vrabie, loc. cit., p. 9; Popescu, op. cit., pp. 94-102.

²⁵Radu, loc. cit.; Popescu, op. cit. pp. 102-106.

Radio Romania Actualități, „Crimea, „bridgehead” for the destabilization of Ukraine”, March 18, 2014, in http://www.romania-actualitati.ro/crimeea_cap_de_pod_pentru_destabilizarea_ukrainei-59262, accessed on December 21, 2021.

²⁷Ofitserov-Belskiy, Sushenstov, loc. cit., p. 287.

²⁸EU Observer, "Pro-West party leads Moldova election" in EU Observer, 12.07.2021, https://euobserver.com/tickers/152409?utm_source=euobs&utm_medium=email, accessed on July 25, 2021.

of Moldova, it remains frozen. All rounds of negotiations have either been blocked and boycotted, or have resulted in delays and avoidance of the adoption of applicable and effective resolutions. The conflict is in a phase of some calm, with the Tiraspol regime maintaining its independent existence with the support of Russian “peacekeeping” troops, but coexisting with the international recognition of the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova, which gives it certain economic advantages after association with the EU and visa liberalization.

In the context of the outbreak and development of Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine, there were moments (especially at the beginning) when the junction of Russian troops in Crimea with those in Transnistria seemed an easy and logical objective in order to seize the entire coastal area of Ukraine on the Black Sea (especially after the conquest of Snake Island, at the end of February 2022), to the enthusiasm of the Tiraspol regime²⁹. Gradually, however, after the Ukrainian armed forces repelled the attack of the Russian forces in the Kherson region, stabilizing the front on the Dnieper, and after the recapture of the Snake Island (June 2022), the strategy of the Transnistrian separatist regime returned to the traditional expectation, probably out of a desire to avoid a direct confrontation with the Ukrainian troops, which could be fatal for it³⁰.

Thus, in the long term, the coexistence and competition between the EU and Russian influences in Transnistria may continue, in a kind of condominium, given that the Russian side holds superiority at the military level, but the EU influence begins to prevail at the economic level. The EU has tried to influence the Transnistrian conflict by emphasizing the resolution of low-level political issues (trade, visa liberalization) and minimizing high-level political issues (the status of the region, relations with Chisinau, peacekeeping troops), with some success³¹.

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A substantial change in the situation could only be generated by a change in the way the population of Transnistria perceives the status of the region and considers the advantages of changing the situation, in one sense or another. For now, this perception is decisively influenced by the supremacy of the Russian mass media and goes in the direction of integration into the Russian Federation or the Eurasian cooperation structures supported by Moscow. The change in the situation, following the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, could influence the heating or not of this conflict, generating (a) the transformation of Transnistria into a new Kaliningrad, (b) the maintenance of the current situation or (c) an (unlikely) reunification of Transnistria with Moldova under the auspices of the EU.

The first of these scenarios could occur if the Russian-Ukrainian conflict does not produce a clear winner, moving towards a temporary ceasefire, supported by external actors (the United States, China, the EU), and the legislative elections in Moldova, scheduled for September 28, 2025, are won by PAS with a sufficient majority. Moscow could, in this situation, rekindle the conflict in Transnistria to counterbalance the partial failure of the intervention in Ukraine and the lack of success of pro-Russian candidates in Chisinau. In the most radical version, Russia could even annex the Transnistrian region, by virtue of the special relations with it after the collapse of the USSR. This would create the impression of a small victory against the West.

The second scenario, which seems most plausible, is that of maintaining the current situation. Thus, Russia would maintain control over the information received by the citizens of Transnistria, of whom over two-thirds are Moldovan citizens and can vote in the legislative elections on September 28, affecting the final result in favour of the pro-Russian forces. Given Ukraine’s support, the EU (including Romania) would not want to change the situation, preferring a European integration of Moldova according to the Cypriot model, even in the absence of control over the districts on the left bank of the Dniester.

The scenario of the reunification of Transnistria with Moldova under the auspices of the EU could become reality only if Russia, weakened by the long-term military intervention in Ukraine, after refusing any attempt at mediation by the United States, resulting in even stronger support for Kiev by the reunified West, would succumb economically (in the absence of substantial support from China and other allies), which would lead to the change of the Putin regime (violent or peaceful) and the end of the war. Under these conditions, the Tiraspol regime would

²⁹ Armand Goșu, *Putin against the West: the war in Ukraine and the new world disorder*, Polirom, Iași, 2023, pp. 87-92, 211-212.

³⁰ Florent Parmentier, “Transnistria, in the shadow of the war in Ukraine” in Policy Brief, Jacques Delors Institute, May 2024, https://institutdelors.eu/content/uploads/2025/04/PB_240516_Moldavie_Transnistrie_Parmentier_EN.pdf, accessed on August 24, 2025.

³¹ Popescu, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

have no alternatives and would move towards coexistence (federal or not) with Chisinau. But this scenario is the most unlikely at present.

For the Republic of Moldova, in the context of the legislative elections on September 28, it is important whether the country will maintain its pro-European direction, as indicated by the victory, even at the limit, of Maia Sandu and the referendum on EU accession in 2024, or whether the population will choose to turn again towards Moscow and nostalgia for the Soviet past will prevail. In any case, however, the political evolution of the Republic of Moldova will be influenced, like the conflict in Transnistria, by the sequence of events at the international level and, first of all, by the evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

MOLDOVA AND THE EU



Moldova 2025: A Choice Between Europe and a Pro-Russian Revanche - Will the EU Course Endure?

Glib OSTAPENKO (Ukraine)

Introduction

On 28 September 2025, Moldova faces a decision of historic weight. That day's parliamentary elections will determine whether the country stays the European course or gives pro-Russian forces an opening for revanche. At stake is the trajectory toward EU membership - framed by the pro-European authorities in Chişinău as a strategic objective to be reached by 2030. Meanwhile, the Kremlin makes no secret of its ambition to pull Moldova back into its orbit, leveraging energy, oligarchic networks, and disinformation. The domestic atmosphere is tense: society is split between those who back European integration and those nostalgic for closer ties with Moscow. This article examines the public mood heading into the vote, the strategies of key political actors and outside powers, and whether Moldova can hold its line toward the EU.



Source: <https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2023/05/time-to-get-serious-about-moldova?lang=en>

The Pro-European Course under Scrutiny

Pro-European forces came to power in Moldova with a substantial mandate for change. After Maia Sandu's victory in the 2020 presidential race and her Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) winning the 2021 parliamentary elections, the country signaled a clear intention to join Europe. In June 2022, Moldova obtained EU candidate status, and by late 2023 Brussels had authorized the opening of accession talks. The government set an ambitious target: EU membership by decade's end. 'We are moving resolutely to become a member state by the end of the decade,' President Sandu declared, describing the path as irreversible.

The European Union has openly backed Moldova's course. On 27 August 2025, Independence Day in Moldova, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk came to Chişinău to signal solidarity ahead of the elections. Brussels has matched words with resources, unveiling a €1.9bn Recovery and Growth Plan to accelerate reforms, attract

investment, and raise living standards. Announced ahead of last year's vote, the package telegraphed that the EU is prepared to invest in Moldova's success and shield it from sliding back into Moscow's sphere. European leaders stress that Moldova belongs in the European family, while making clear that 'homework' remains - from institution-building to anti-corruption. Inside the EU, the logic of eastern enlargement is increasingly framed not as **if** but **when**; European Council leaders have urged readiness to welcome new members around 2030. In short, Moldova's European vector enjoys strong external support and a clear horizon, but delivery ultimately depends on political will in Chişinău and on Moldovans' choice.

Public Mood: Euro-Optimists vs. Euro-Skeptics

Despite diplomatic momentum, domestic support for EU integration is not uniform. The government's consultative referendum to enshrine the EU course in the constitution produced a warning sign: the pro-EU amendment barely cleared the threshold, with 50.46% voting 'yes'. The country is, in effect, split down the middle on its geopolitical future. President Sandu called the result 'only the first battle in a difficult and unfair struggle' and urged the EU to engage more decisively lest Moldova drift back toward the Kremlin's orbit. The divide runs along generational and geographic lines. Urban youth tend to look West, seeking European opportunities and standards of living. Older voters, especially in rural areas, retain a more favorable view of the Soviet past and consume Russian media. Economic strain amplifies discontent: stagnation and rising poverty (the share living below the poverty line increased from 31.6% to 33.6% over the past year) feed frustration. The opposition leverages these grievances to argue that the European course has not yielded tangible prosperity. Farmers have staged repeated protests over the dire situation in agriculture. While Russia's war against Ukraine has undeniably disrupted markets and supply chains, voters are increasingly unconvinced that the war alone explains all economic woes. These elections will therefore serve not just as a geopolitical referendum but as a verdict on the government's domestic performance.

The Moldovan diaspora is pivotal. Hundreds of thousands of citizens, mostly in EU countries, traditionally vote for pro-Western candidates. Diaspora ballots were instrumental in Sandu's earlier victory over a pro-Russian opponent in the presidential race, and they again proved decisive in 2024, when Sandu defeated Alexandr Stoianoglo by roughly ten points. It is no surprise that pro-Russian forces try to delegitimize out-of-country voting as 'unfair.' Lawful and entrenched, the diaspora vote may once more determine whether the pro-EU camp can retain a parliamentary majority.

The Kremlin, Revanche, and 'Hybrid' Levers of Influence

Moscow wants to arrest Moldova's westward drift and reassert influence, employing the familiar hybrid toolkit, from economic pressure to information operations. Energy dependence remains the Kremlin's most potent lever. Pro-Russian politicians slam the government for breaking with Gazprom and promise to restore cheap Russian gas if elected. The message resonates with households worn down by high utility bills; the opposition bloc 'Alternative' has even written the resumption of Russian gas deliveries into its program as a 'pragmatic' step. Yet cheap gas has long served as Moscow's political cudgel. Russia has repeatedly used supply cutoffs to punish Chişinău, including during the 2022–23 winter, forcing emergency purchases of electricity and gas from EU markets at commercial prices. A stopgap arrangement eased the immediate crunch in early 2025 - but at the cost of deepening Russian leverage over Transnistria, the breakaway region that hosts a key power plant. Energy remains Moldova's Achilles' heel.

Another channel is the **oligarchic-corruption nexus**. Russia has financially underwritten friendly elites. The emblematic case is Ilan Şor, a fugitive tycoon accused of stealing \$1bn from Moldovan banks. His openly pro-Russian party orchestrated months-long, paid protests in Chişinău in autumn 2022, weaponizing anger over tariffs and inflation. The authorities ultimately banned the Şor party for anti-constitutional activity, shutting it out of the current race. From abroad, the oligarch still seeks to destabilize the country; President Sandu has alleged that the Kremlin intends to funnel around \$100m, reportedly via cryptocurrency, to boost pro-Russian forces ahead of the vote. For a small state, that figure underscores how determined Moscow is to shape the outcome.

The Kremlin also fights on the **information front**. Pro-Russian TV channels and Telegram networks push narratives about 'Europe's fatigue with Moldova' and the 'futility' of reforms. Alexandr Stoianoglo, now a leading face of 'Alternative', recently claimed the West would 'lose interest' in Moldova once the war in Ukraine ends. Russian propaganda warns that EU integration will drag Moldova into war or strip it of neutrality. Simultaneously, 'traditional values' are instrumentalized: Chişinău's mayor Ion Ceban (a key

'Alternative' figure) has courted conservative voters - last year he even banned the LGBT Pride march in the capital, drawing criticism from Western partners. Even without hard proof that 'Alternative' is financed from Moscow, its rhetoric objectively serves the Kremlin's aims: stress social pain points, sow skepticism about the EU, promise 'friendship' with Russia, and avoid 'provoking' it.

Political Olayers: Who's Who in the 2025 Race

Twenty-one parties and blocs are on the ballot, but the contest will revolve around three poles.

1) Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS). Led by Igor Grosu, PAS is the governing pro-European force and currently holds 61 of 101 seats - an outright majority. Polling before the vote has been unkind: PAS's ratings dipped, with projections around 40–41 seats - short of a single-party majority. Fatigue with slow domestic change and painful economic measures has taken a toll. High-profile anti-corruption promises have stalled: none of the notorious figures ended up behind bars; oligarchs like Vlad Plahotniuc and Ilan Șor fled and have evaded justice. Judicial reform remains halting; critics accuse PAS of stacking the Constitutional Court. Procurement controversies - alleged sweetheart contracts to relatives of MPs - have further dented the brand. PAS has thus centered its campaign on geopolitics, casting itself as the sole guarantor of EU integration: a vote for PAS equals a vote for Europe; the rest is a slide back into the past. Brussels broadly echoes this framing: Sandu's team is the tested partner, and their defeat would set back the EU's eastern enlargement project.

2) The 'Patriotic Bloc.' Anchored by the Socialists and Communists and led by former presidents Igor Dodon and Vladimir Voronin, this is the traditional pro-Russian camp. They call for 'restoring friendship with Russia,' deride the EU course as incompatible with Moldova's neutrality, and flirt with scrapping the EU Association Agreement in favor of the Eurasian Economic Union. The message lands with parts of the older electorate and in Gagauzia, but the bloc is far from its zenith; polls suggest around 36 seats. The Kremlin's backing - overt and covert - remains, including regular pilgrimages to Moscow by Socialist MPs and renewed talk of 'federalization,' a long-standing Russian project. With the war next door, though, explicit pro-Kremlin branding is toxic for many voters, so the bloc now leans hard into social themes - poverty, tariffs, jobs - downplaying geopolitics.

3) The 'Alternative' bloc. Marketed as a 'third way,' it claims to be nominally pro-EU while advocating a reset with Russia. The roster is eclectic: popular Chișinău mayor Ion Ceban (ex-Socialist, now independent), former Prosecutor General Alexandr Stoianoglo, ex-PM Ion Chicu, and several alumni of the Communist camp around Voronin's ex-strategist Mark Tkaciuk. What unites them is a common enemy - PAS and Sandu, whom they accuse of power-grabbing. 'Alternative' decries 'rules rigged for the incumbents' and 'lawfare' against opponents. It promises 'professionalism over politics,' focusing on bread-and-butter issues - prices, wages, corruption. On paper it does not reject EU integration, but it opposes NATO and resists curbs on Russian media. The government suspects a pro-Russian core beneath the moderate façade. Some actions fuel concern: as mayor, Ceban has cultivated ties with Moscow and championed socially conservative moves - prompting Bucharest to float a Schengen entry ban for him. Polls put 'Alternative' near 13 seats - enough to be a kingmaker in any anti-PAS coalition. If the Socialists are the overtly pro-Russian pole, 'Alternative' is the 'soft-landing' option for disillusioned voters who want change without sharp foreign-policy turns - a scenario the Kremlin could live with.

Will the EU Course Hold?

These parliamentary elections are a stress test of Moldova's European trajectory. Whether pro-EU forces can retain power and keep reforms on track will hinge on the integrity of the vote. The authorities have tightened laws to deter bribery and other abuses - introducing stricter vetting of candidates, closer party-finance scrutiny, and measures against 'electoral tourism.' Thousands involved in mass vote-buying schemes linked to the Șor network have been identified and fined. Yet the Russian factor remains a wild card: amid a European war, Moscow can escalate with provocations, cyberattacks, or coordinated disinformation to sow confusion. Some fear that, if the result goes against the Kremlin's preferences, the pro-Russian opposition could dispute the outcome and mobilize street pressure. While large-scale unrest is not forecast, the government is on alert, and Western partners are assisting on cybersecurity and public order.

Most analysts judge a wholesale pivot back to the 'Russian world' as unlikely. Even if PAS loses its single-party majority, pro-Russian parties would struggle to assemble a stable coalition, interests diverge, and

open association with the toxic Șor brand is politically costly. After the horrors of Russia's war in Ukraine, even many in the opposition recognize that an overtly pro-Kremlin line lacks broad support and risks Western sanctions. Hence nearly all major players now **declare** support for EU integration; differences are about pace and conditionality. On this reading, the EU course will probably persist - the question is how fast it advances.

For now, Moldova is holding to its European path, albeit over thorny ground. Russia's war against Ukraine has paradoxically nudged Moldovan society closer to the West; overtly pro-Moscow positioning has acquired a reputational cost. A new generation of politicians and voters is gradually emerging, one that sees no future in post-Soviet stagnation. **I am convinced that, strategically, Moldova has already chosen Europe; the question is who will lead it along that path in the coming years, and how confidently.** The 28 September vote will show whether today's pro-Western governing line continues intact or must seek compromises in coalition. Either way, the European Union has made its signal plain: the door remains open, and membership by decade's end is plausibly within reach. The rest is up to Moldovans - whether they have the patience, resilience, and clarity to stay the course toward a shared European future.

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA



Crucial Parliamentary Elections for the Future of the Republic of Moldova

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„You have learned the rules of the game. All you have to do is play better than anyone else .”

Albert Einstein

Introduction

On April 17, 2025, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova voted in favour of holding parliamentary elections on September 28, 2025, an election that is expected to be closely contested and that could significantly change the distribution of parliamentary mandates. 57 MPs supported holding elections on September 28, while 32 abstained. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, the voter turnout was 48.5%. In the 2024 presidential elections, the voter turnout was 54%.

On September 28, 2025, the electorate on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and in the diaspora will go to the polls in what could prove to be one of the most important and crucial moments for the country since the declaration of independence. The stakes are arguably the highest ever. Will Moldova stay on course to join the European Union (EU), or could it suffer a power shift that would undo years of progress?

Since the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won the last election, Moldova has taken bold steps toward EU membership - obtaining candidate status in 2022, opening accession negotiations in 2024, and most recently enshrining EU candidate status in its constitution through a narrowly adopted referendum. Yet Moldova remains deeply vulnerable. Russia continues to exert influence through disinformation, electoral interference, and the unresolved conflict in Transnistria. Domestically, the government faces growing challenges: fighting corruption, accelerating economic reforms, and meeting the high expectations of its citizens.

In the current context, as is natural, many debates have arisen at the international level that have generated numerous questions to which answers are sought: Can PAS obtain another mandate in the elections of



Source: <https://moldova1.md/p/47660/retrospectiva---alegeri-la-28-septembrie-r-moldova-intre-amenintarile-kremlinului-sprijnul-occidentului-si-lectiile-foametei>

September 28, 2025 to boost the European agenda? Or will the Eurosceptic forces win the elections, changing the potential trajectory of Moldova and reshaping Chisinau's relationship with the EU and Russia?

The Evolution and Current Configuration of the Political Environment in the Republic of Moldova before the Parliamentary Elections of September 28, 2025

The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova has a total of 101 seats for which parliamentary elections are planned to be held every four years. During the electoral process, the seats are filled through proportional representation of the party list. An electoral list can contain between 51–103 candidates. The electoral threshold at the national level varies depending on the type of list; for single parties or organizations it is 5%; for an electoral bloc of two or more political formations it is 7%; for independent candidates, the threshold is 2%. The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova operates on the principle of absolute majority (51 deputies), who have the possibility to vote for organic laws, as well as to vote for or dismiss the Government of the Republic of Moldova. The constitutional majority (also known as the supermajority) represents two-thirds of the number of deputies (68 seats) and has the power to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova or dismiss the President of the Republic of Moldova.

The last parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova took place on July 11, 2021 and resulted in a victory for the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), whose first leader was the current President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, and whose current leader is Igor Grosu, the current President of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. In the last election (2021), PAS obtained 63 of the 101 seats in the Parliament in Chisinau, which allowed it to form a single majority government. The elections marked a significant change in Moldova's path towards European integration, as PAS defeated the Communist and Socialist Bloc, a pro-Russian electoral alliance led by Igor Dodon and Vladimir Voronin, which won 32 parliamentary seats in the 2021 elections. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, the last six parliamentary seats were won by the Shor Party, one of Moscow's key instruments of influence through which support is provided to political actors opposing Moldova's pro-EU trajectory, these parliamentarians currently running as so-called independent candidates.

The period following the 2021 parliamentary elections has witnessed a very interesting flow of developments. Thus, the Shor Party¹ was banned by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova, in 2023, due to corruption and links to Russian influence networks. In response, the founder of the Shor Party and exiled oligarch Ilan Shor² helped establish the Victory Bloc³, in April 2024, as a coalition of pro-Russian parties. This political formation was launched in Moscow, sending a clear signal that Russia not only supports, but also actively coordinates the domestic opposition in the Republic of Moldova. Russian officials are reported to have contributed to the financing and organization of the aforementioned political bloc, providing campaign funding and a narrative structure designed to polarize the electorate and challenge the legitimacy of Moldova's Western partnerships. As a result, following recent developments, the current situation in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is as follows, which is slightly modified compared to the one resulting from the 2021 parliamentary elections: the Action and Solidarity Party (pro-EU) has 61 parliamentary mandates, the Communist and Socialist Bloc (pro-Russian) has 26 parliamentary mandates (the Communist Party, 8 mandates, the Socialist Party, 18 mandates), the Victory Bloc (pro-Russian) has 9 parliamentary mandates (given the existing situation created, the Shor Party is no longer officially represented in Parliament, but is actually represented by 5 so-called independent parliamentarians), the Renaissance Party has 4 parliamentarians, and the current

¹On June 19, 2023, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova ruled, at the request of the government, that the Shor Party is illegal and *de jure* dissolved. The Shor Party appears in a criminal case regarding the financing of an electoral campaign in the 2021 elections for the mayor of Balti city and for receiving money from a criminal group. Ilan Shor himself, who fled Moldova in June 2019 after the constitutional crisis, was sentenced in absentia on April 13, 2023 by the judges of the Chisinau Court of Appeal to 15 years in prison with a sentence to be served in a closed prison.

²In a video message posted on August 11, 2025, the fugitive and convicted Moldovan oligarch promised "salaries of \$3,000 per month to all those who protest against the government in the Great National Assembly Square in Chisinau." He promises \$100 per day to those who join these organized protests, which are supported by his extensive network, established in recent years. This network now reportedly includes more than 130,000 people, about 10% of Moldova's estimated 1.5 million regular voters. Ilan Shor was sentenced to 15 years in prison for fraud and money laundering in April 2023, after fleeing the country in June 2019. After spending several years in Israel, he moved to Moscow in 2024. There, he is leading a large-scale operation, supported by the Kremlin, trying to influence the electoral process in Moldova by offering bribes.

³The Victory Bloc was officially founded by Ilan Shor on April 21, 2024, in Moscow, Russia, during a meeting at the Carlton Hotel. In addition to Shor, the agreement to create the bloc was also signed by the governor of Gagauzia, Evghenia Guțul, as well as the

Alternative Bloc actually has one MP who occupies a seat from the National Alternative Movement⁴, to all of which four other independent parliamentarians not politically affiliated are added.

Main extra-parliamentary political formations:

- The Patriotic Electoral Bloc (BEP), officially the Patriotic Electoral Bloc of Socialists, Communists, Heart and Future of Moldova, is a left-wing electoral alliance created to participate in the parliamentary elections of September 28, 2025. On June 4, 2025, the Platform for Moldova was formed, with the aim of uniting opposition parties, and later received support from the Party of Socialists, the Party of Communists, and the Future of Moldova. On July 4, 2025, Igor Dodon announced negotiations to form a left-wing bloc. Vladimir Voronin later confirmed that the bloc would include the PSRM, the PCRM, the Heart of Moldova Party, and the Future of Moldova Party. On July 22, the leaders of the four parties announced the formation of an electoral bloc. However, the PCRM threatened to withdraw from the negotiations after, according to some sources, it demanded preferential places on the electoral lists.

- The Alternative Bloc is a political alliance in the Republic of Moldova, founded in 2025 by Ion Ceban, the current mayor of Chisinau, now joined by the 2024 presidential candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo, former Prime Minister Ion Chicu and former MP Mark Tkachuk. This alliance theoretically presents itself as pro-European and supportive of European integration as a major objective for the Republic of Moldova.

- Our Party, formerly known as the People's Party, is a left-wing populist political party in Moldova. Founded in 1999 as the Christian Democratic Peasant Party of Moldova, it promotes support for Russians in Moldova, social conservatism and moderate euroscepticism. The party's president is Renato Usatii, and other key figures include Dumitru Ciubașenco (the party's candidate in the 2016 presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova) and Ilian Cașu (the party's vice-president and 2015 candidate for mayor of Chișinău).

- The coalition formed by the Party of Change (PS) (a center-right political party in the Republic of Moldova, led by lawyer Ștefan Gligor⁵, formed by an initiative group in January 2021, and later, in the spring, registered by the justice bodies) and the Green Ecological Party (formerly known as the Green Ecological Party of Moldova - Green Alliance).

- The Greater Moldova Party, known before 2020 as the Party for the People and the Country and sometimes translated as the Greater Moldova Party.

- The European Social Democratic Party (PSDE) is a centre-left, populist social-democratic political party. Founded in 1997, the party has pro-European views and is an associate member of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and a full member of the Socialist International. According to its statute, the PSDE claims that the Republic of Moldova is an independent, sovereign and democratic state, based on the rule of law and integrated into the united family of European democracies. Reflecting the views of former leader Marian Lupu, but also the strong influence of the Orthodox Church of the Republic of Moldova, the party is more conservative on social issues, such as LGBT rights.

In such a context, it is significant to mention here that at the level of the Central Court of Appeal, the requests made by the leaders of three political parties requesting the annulment of the decision of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), approved on August 3, 2025, by which they were excluded from the list of eligible parties to participate in the parliamentary elections of September 28, 2025, were rejected as "unfounded". However, the parties — Chance, Victory and Force of Alternative and Salvation of Moldova — have the option to challenge the decision of the Court of Appeal at the Supreme Court of Justice within three days. The CEC based its decision to exclude these three parties on the decisions of the Public Services Agency not to register changes to the data registered in the State Register of Legal Entities. As I have already emphasized in a previous sentence, these parties, together with the Renaissance Party, formed the Victoria electoral bloc in Moscow to participate in the parliamentary elections to be held on September 28, 2025. However, the Central Electoral Authority rejected the application for registration of this bloc. One of the reasons cited by the CEC for this exclusion was a notification from the Intelligence and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova regarding the direct involvement of Ilan Shor, the leader of the former Shor Party, declared unconstitutional by

⁴The National Alternative Movement (MAN) is a political party in the Republic of Moldova. It was created in late December 2021. The party is led by the mayor of Chișinău, Ion Ceban. The party is in opposition to the current government of the Republic of Moldova. Speculations about disagreements between Ion Ceban and the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova began in 2021. Finally, in December 2021, I. Ceban announced the creation of the National Alternative Movement. On December 21, 2022, the founding congress of the party took place. I. Ceban officially announced the registration of his party on January 17, 2023.

⁵In fact, Ștefan Gligor was part of the PAS initiative group, alongside Maia Sandu, but due to certain disagreements, they quarreled and he left the platform.

a decision of the Constitutional Court in 2023, in the formation of the so-called electoral bloc. Following this, the Renaissance Party separately submitted its registration documents to the CEC and is awaiting the decision of the Central Electoral Authority regarding its participation in the elections on September 28, 2025.

Russia Seeks to Destabilize Moldova through Multiple Hybrid Actions

While Russia is waging a kinetic war against Ukraine, it is also waging a hybrid war against Moldova. Russia intensified its hybrid attacks against Moldova in late spring 2022 - after Russian forces failed to reach Moldova through southern Ukraine. This hybrid war is characterized by its intensity, scale, and scope. Russia's ultimate goal is to overthrow the reformist government in Chisinau, to take political control of Moldova, and to prevent it from moving closer to the West, particularly through EU accession. Russia's ambitions in Moldova are part of Moscow's project to keep its neighboring states under control and to reestablish Russia as a great power. This is evidence of how Russia's imperial project extends beyond Ukraine.

As is well known, Russia has attempted to violently overthrow the government in Chisinau. In February 2023, the authorities in Chisinau - following a tip from Ukraine - sent back 12 Serbian citizens suspected of heading to Chisinau to participate in an attempted coup in Moldova, planned by Russian mercenaries of Wagner. The Serbs had tried to enter Moldova posing as football fans and were planning to participate in violent actions against government institutions, according to Moldovan authorities. Although the majority of the 3.3 million inhabitants of the Republic of Moldova favor the country's Western trajectory, a significant part of the population is still sympathetic to Russia. As a result, the weak resilience of society contributes to Moldova's vulnerability to Moscow's hybrid attacks. Russia maintains influence over Moldova through the break-away region of Transnistria, where Russia maintains about 1,500 Russian soldiers, many of whom are originally from the region. Russia also promotes secessionism in Gagauzia, a region in the south of the country, as a way to destabilize Moldova. Daily hybrid attacks range from disinformation operations to cyberattacks, sabotage, and hooliganism. They are carried out mainly in Moldova, but also in the EU, to harm Moldova's interests abroad and damage relations with key partners. Activities originating from inside Russia include fake bomb threats, disinformation campaigns, training agents, and illicit money transfers. Russia often relies on third-country jurisdictions as transit countries, particularly in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, to transfer money and agents. Russian hybrid attacks aim to sow discord in Moldovan society and generate fear among people, preventing them from supporting Moldova's Western orientation. Russia uses the threat of war as a leitmotif to fuel fear in a society already shaken by Russia's war against Ukraine. A telling example of this is that of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who issued a not-so-veiled threat in March 2025 that Chisinau risks "following in the footsteps of the Kiev regime."

It has become very clear that after Russia's failures to thwart the positive results of the presidential elections and the referendum on enshrining Moldova's EU aspirations in the constitution, which took place in 2024, another failure by Russia and the registration of a positive result for the Republic of Moldova in the parliamentary electoral process on September 28 would run counter to Russia's objective of forcing Moldova into its sphere of influence. Such a development is likely, because even though Moldova has suffered a brain drain since gaining independence in the early 1990s, following the rise to power of pro-European leaders and political formations, a number of Western-educated Moldovans have returned to the country to help with the reform process and counter the hybrid operations of Moscow and some Moldovans still supporting Moldova's growing rapprochement with Russia.

In the same context, Russia is also trying other methods and procedures to attract the Republic of Moldova into its sphere of influence and domination

On July 10, 2025, on a Russian government website, it was announced to the international public that the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, Alexander Novak, met with the leaders of some Moldovan political parties: Igor Dodon (Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova), Irina Vlah (Heart of Moldova) and Vasile Tarlev (Future of Moldova). The discussions focused on economic and energy cooperation between the two nations. Alexander Novak emphasized Russia's commitment to cultivating friendly relations, to promoting friendship and cooperation with the Republic of Moldova, where over 220,000 Russian citizens live. At the same time, the Moldovan diaspora in the Russian Federation is estimated at between 300,000 and 500,000 people. "Russia is determined to maintain and develop centuries-old ties with the Republic of Moldova, continuing the dialogue with all constructive political forces in the republic that advocate for the consolidation of Moldovan statehood, sovereignty, preserving its neutral status and strengthening friendly relations with our country," said Alexander Novak during a meeting with representatives of the Party of Socialists, The Heart of

Moldova and the Future of Moldova. In recent years, due to the policies of the current Moldovan authorities, economic relations between Russia and Moldova have deteriorated significantly. Following Moldova's signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, trade between the two countries has declined sharply. By 2015, the volume of trade between Russia and Moldova had decreased by 32%, and Russia's share in Moldovan exports had fallen from 70% to just over 3% over the course of 15 years.

It is noteworthy that Alexander Novak also wanted to emphasize that energy has always been a crucial component of cooperation between Moscow and Chisinau, emphasizing: "Russia has consistently supplied gas to Moldova at significantly more favorable prices compared to deliveries to Europe. It is not clear why this arrangement does not suit the Moldovan authorities". In turn, Igor Dodon emphasized the following: "The Moldovan authorities have abandoned direct contracts with Russian partners. Moreover, they have created almost unacceptable working conditions for Moldovagaz. We firmly believe that it is necessary to return to direct dialogue and direct deliveries". He noted that in 2020, Moldova purchased Russian gas at \$148 per thousand cubic meters - the lowest price in the last 10-15 years, according to the Moldovan politician. "Undoubtedly, these were extremely advantageous tariffs for end consumers, our economy and the competitiveness of our goods. Under the current administration in power, we purchased Russian gas at 842 dollars - tariffs have also increased sevenfold," Igor Dodon added. In such a context, it is significant to emphasize that Alexander Novak emphasized that Russia is ready to resume friendly cooperation in the energy sector, if the Moldovan authorities demonstrate such readiness.

Developments in the Political Decision-Making Process in the Republic of Moldova in the Context of Russian Hybrid Actions

Since coming to power, the government formed and led by PAS has pursued the adoption of anti-corruption decisions and measures, judicial reforms and the intensification of the integration process into the European Union (EU). In turn, pro-Russian opposition forces have mainly organized protests against the economic policies of the Moldovan government.

As the Republic of Moldova approaches the electoral campaign and parliamentary elections, this time crucial for the future of this neighboring state of Romania, elections that will take place on September 28, 2025, this small European state is at the epicenter of a Russian hybrid offensive that is intensifying day by day. Chisinau is facing a campaign of disruption with a very complex spectrum, which combines disinformation, coercion especially in the energy field, influencing the electoral process by influencing the electorate and digital subversion to fracture the resilience of the Republic of Moldova.

In this context, it is significant to highlight that, in June 2025, the Republic of Moldova conducted an exercise on digital hybrid threats in partnership with the European Commission. The stress test, held in Chisinau, was the first of its kind and brought together EU officials, Moldovan institutions, fact-checkers, cybersecurity teams and representatives of Meta, Google and TikTok. Together, they explored coordinated responses to a range of hybrid threats, including disinformation, cyberattacks, platform manipulation and artificial intelligence-based content forgery. This initiative demonstrated the Republic of Moldova's increasing integration with EU mechanisms for digital resilience and defense in the context of hybrid threats, including the Hybrid Fusion Cell and the Rapid Cyber Response Teams. It also highlighted the EU's evolving role in supporting democratic resilience in candidate countries, a key priority as Moldova deepens its EU accession process.

How this small but determined republic reacts and how strongly the international community supports it will send a strong signal about the future of EU enlargement and whether democracies on Europe's eastern edge can withstand and repel the pressure of authoritarian and coordinated interference from other international actors with vested interests in the eastern region of Europe.

In the context of these latest developments, some predictable and others with a high level of unpredictability, the main goal of the various international actors with significant interests in this region, the main actor with the greatest interests being the Russian Federation, is to generate enough confusion and cynicism that Moldovan citizens will completely withdraw from the implementation of the real democratic process and, implicitly, from the process underway for EU integration. In the Republic of Moldova, this means for those interested entities encouraging apathy, disillusionment and the false feeling that no political option is worth and should not be trusted.

As is well known, the vote cast in the previous elections by the Moldovan diaspora saved the situation and created a surprise in the presidential elections of 2024, which led Moscow to now intensify its efforts in the Moldovan communities that are located and live in the midst of other civilizations, especially now in 2025.

In the presidential elections of 2024, the current president Maia Sandu was re-elected with 55.3% of the vote, defeating the pro-Russian candidate, Alexandr Stoianoglo. The elections were overshadowed by accusations of Russian interference, with the authorities confiscating illegal propaganda materials. In parallel with the elections, Moldova held a referendum on EU integration, which was approved with a very narrow majority of 50.4%. For some time, but more intensely now, Moldova has been facing major security and economic challenges, especially energy security issues due to the disruption of gas supplies from Russia. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered a massive influx of refugees into the Republic of Moldova. All these difficulties really amplify the importance of the parliamentary elections on September 28, 2025. According to a significant part of the international media, for President Maia Sandu the parliamentary elections to be held on September 28, 2025 could be classified as “a final battle” on Moldova’s path to EU accession.

The disinformation campaign targeting the 2025 Moldovan elections is described in international media as “unprecedented in volume and coordination,” involving Russian state media, various social networks, and local political representatives on an unprecedented scale and intensity, all of which amplify anti-European and anti-government messages across multiple platforms. A particularly insidious example is the anti-EU chat bot, “STOP EU,” which simulates messages with the aim of disseminating deep disinformation aligned with that projected by the Kremlin. These narratives target emotionally resonant themes, such as Moldova’s energy insecurity, its complex identity politics, and fears about national sovereignty.

Beyond political and informational influence, Russia continues to exploit Moldova’s economic vulnerabilities, particularly in the energy sector. In late 2024 and early 2025, Gazprom drastically reduced natural gas supplies to Moldova, triggering power outages and heating shortages in several cities. The effects were particularly acute in Transnistria, the Russian-backed separatist region in eastern Moldova, where authorities have warned of an imminent humanitarian crisis. The Kremlin and its local representatives have tried to blame Chisinau for creating such a crisis, claiming that pro-European policies have disrupted vital energy flows. In fact, the shortages were created by Moscow itself, part of a long-standing strategy of energy coercion. Moldova’s pro-EU liberal President Maia Sandu has described the move as “energetic blackmail” aimed at influencing public sentiment ahead of the September 28, 2025 elections.

Following the 2024 presidential elections, credible reports emerged of various Russian-backed and implicated actors offering money, food, and even firewood in exchange for votes cast for pro-Russian political parties. This old-fashioned tactic, dressed up in 21st-century geopolitics, has been and will certainly continue to be used to erode public trust and tip the balance by fostering a sense of desperation and manipulation among the population. As a result, in the context of the parliamentary elections to be held on September 28, 2025, in the Republic of Moldova, most observers are showing extreme caution in terms of analyses, forecasts and predictions regarding the political, social and security situation that will exist in the Republic of Moldova before, during the electoral campaign, during the electoral process, but especially after the announcement of the official results that will be recorded. The bitter experience of the referendum in the fall of 2024, regarding the consecration of the EU integration program and the presidential elections that followed, the results of which evolved chaotically and with significant differences compared to the projections generated by the polls, has left absolutely all political actors and analysts with a deeply cautious attitude.

Two key variables that could also shape the electoral results of September 28, 2025 are the growing and considerable influence of the Moldovan diaspora and the inevitable Russian factor seeking to generate significant influence that would generate a high level of coercion.

However, there is a broad consensus in Chisinau that the ruling PAS party will likely win the next parliamentary elections, despite the severe social and economic pressures that the Republic of Moldova continues to face as a result of Russia’s war in Ukraine, which began in 2022. Commonly described as “squeezed” between its two larger neighbors – Ukraine and Romania – and with the Russian-occupied region of Transnistria – the Republic of Moldova today resembles more of a geopolitical sandwich. Isolated from the strategic Ukrainian port city of Odessa and with only one viable transit route through Romania, the Republic of Moldova has been forced to import energy and goods from the EU. GDP grew by only 0.1% in 2024. The result is increased social tensions, especially in rural areas. The economic and social burden has pushed PAS to focus its political narrative on the path of EU integration, just as it did in the presidential campaign of current President Maia Sandu last year. The launch of accession talks in conjunction with the “historic” EU-Moldova summit on July 4, 2025, in Chisinau, should provide PAS with a significant boost before Moldovan citizens cast their votes on September 28, 2025. The key tool and essential motivation for pro-government mobilization, however, is the Russian hybrid threat. Moscow was actively involved in last year’s presidential campaign and

is demonstrating the same involvement this year. However, the “pro-Russian” label has been increasingly used, being applied not only against the henchmen of notorious Moscow-based oligarch Ilan Shor and former President Igor Dodon’s Socialist Party, but more recently against other opposition forces, including the Alternativa Bloc. This new political formation – which, as I have previously mentioned, brings together Chisinau Mayor Ion Ceban, 2024 presidential candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo, former Prime Minister Ion Chicu and Mark Tkaciuk, former parliamentarian and former chief of staff to President Vladimir Voronin – has accused PAS of applying political pressure in the form of changes to electoral rules, as well as criminal investigations and proceedings.

On July 30, Moldovan President M. Sandu told the international public that the biggest threats to the September 28 parliamentary elections are electoral corruption and illegal foreign financing by Russia, accusations denied by Moscow. “Russia wants to control Moldova starting this fall and is preparing unprecedented interference in the September 2025 elections,” M. Sandu stressed at a press conference in Chisinau. On July 30, the Kremlin denied that Russia had attempted to interfere in the elections. It has become very clear that pro-Russian parties want to form a political bloc to win the elections and remove the current government, which has pledged to join the EU by 2030. Ties between Russia and Moldova have deteriorated as the Moldovan government has accelerated its efforts to integrate into the EU. “The greatest danger of Russian interference in our internal affairs is that it poses a direct threat to our country’s national security, sovereignty and European future,” Sandu added. Moscow has denied these accusations, but the government in Chisinau has conveyed to international public opinion that the main tools that could be used by Russia include voter bribery, cyber-attacks, information manipulation campaigns and paid protests. “The financing of approximately 100 million euros is planned to be done only through cryptocurrencies,” Sandu added, referring to the funds that, she said, could be used for electoral corruption. As a result, it is significant to mention here that an opinion poll published in July placed PAS as having 27.4% support from the electorate before the elections, compared to 10.4% for the opposition socialists.

The EU Will Play a Key Role in Monitoring the Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Moldova

In the current security context in the region and the key outcomes of the latest summits, we can say ahead of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova that the EU has and will play a key and decisive role. The Republic of Moldova is not only a candidate for EU membership, but can also be seen as a test case for the EU’s capacity to defend democracy, deter malign influence and project stability in its immediate neighborhood. The following recommendations outline urgent steps the EU can take to strengthen Moldova’s defenses and maintain the integrity of its democratic process in order to provide a clear path to EU accession. If the EU is serious about a Moldova whole and free, then it must provide a clear path to accession well in advance of the elections. In addition, EU leaders should provide visible support and highlight the EU’s financial commitment through the Reform and Growth Facility, which makes biannual payments of €400 million to support Moldova’s path to accession. EU leaders should plan to attend various events in Moldova, ideally accompanied by business representatives who will announce plans for new investments in a free and democratic Moldova. A telling example of this is the fact that around twenty journalists from the print, online, television and radio media in the Republic of Moldova are now better equipped to report on the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2025. Their understanding of electoral processes was improved during the Electoral School for Journalists, held on 26-27 July 2025. The event was organized by the Council of Europe in partnership with the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and the Centre for Continuing Electoral Training. The training also included practical sessions on the interaction between journalists and electoral actors, covering topics such as image crises during electoral campaigns and tackling electoral disinformation, and how politicians tend to exploit the potential of the media. “As representatives of the media, we have a responsibility to provide balanced coverage of the electoral process,” said Lucia Vieru, reporter and presenter at Teleradio-Moldova. “Therefore, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the legal framework and rules governing the electoral period, the campaign and, of course, the election-day itself.” The mentioned activity was carried out within the framework of the Project “Improving Electoral Practice in the Republic of Moldova (IEPRM) 2025-2028”, part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2025-2028.

Given the huge funding loss suffered by USAID, the EU must urgently expand funding for civil society and public education campaigns in Moldova aimed at countering disinformation and promoting democracy. These efforts should emphasize multilingual, culturally adapted messages, especially in Russian- and Gagauz-speaking communities. The EU’s StratCom East Task Force should deepen partnerships with Moldovan ministries, and the EU should make full use of its cyber rapid response teams and hybrid fusion cell to support Moldovan election security remotely. This includes real-time monitoring of digital platforms for coordinated influence operations, artificial amplification, and cyber disruption. These resources should work in close coordination with the Moldovan

Cyber Emergency Response Center (CERT) and national intelligence structures, ensuring interoperability and rapid exchange of information. The EU should significantly increase funding for independent journalism, fact-checking organizations and watchdog NGOs in Moldova. Long-term sustainability programs, such as core funding grants under the European Endowment for Democracy, should be adapted to the scale of the hybrid threat that Moldova currently faces. It has become very clear that the EU should deploy a long-term election observation mission (EOM), with specialists in digital interference, political financing and strategic communication. The findings of the mission should directly inform the EU-Moldova post-election engagement, including support for institutional reforms and resilience building. Moldova's intensified efforts to regulate effectively countering online disinformation and illicit political financing can benefit from EU expertise and specific legal assistance. Through the EU's Twinning and TAIEX instruments, the European Commission has the capacity to support the development and implementation by the Republic of Moldova of laws that align with EU standards, regarding freedom of expression, electoral fairness and cybersecurity.

According to the head of Moldova's Security and Intelligence Service (SIS), Alexandru Musteață⁶, the parliamentary elections on September 28, 2025, are expected to face significant interference from Russia. He warned that Moscow will likely use tactics used during the 2024 presidential elections and the referendum on EU integration, including disinformation campaigns, financial support for pro-Russian parties and other covert efforts to destabilize the democratic process in Moldova.

The Moldovan government has expressed its determination to counter these threats. The leader of the Moldovan opposition, Alexandr Stoianoglo, who lost the 2024 presidential elections to incumbent President Maia Sandu, also reportedly announced at some point the formation of a coalition of which he is a member to challenge the pro-Western ruling majority. The coalition, called Alternativa, unites three political parties led by Chisinau Mayor Ion Ceban, former Prime Minister Ion Chicu and former MP Mark Tkachuk. While Stoianoglo is known to advocate a foreign policy that includes both Russia and the West, he nevertheless leaned towards Russia, his previous presidential candidacy being supported by the PSRM, a pro-Moscow political party. In such a context, we can emphasize that tensions between Moldova and Russia remain on the rise, with accusations that Russia tried to interfere in the past elections and that it aggravated the energy crisis in Moldova. On June 4, 2025, the Platform for Moldova was formed, with the aim of uniting the opposition parties, which later received support from the Party of Socialists, the Party of Communists and the Future of Moldova Party. On July 4, 2025, Igor Dodon announced negotiations for a left-wing bloc. Vladimir Voronin later confirmed that the bloc would include the PSRM, the PCRM, the Heart of Moldova Party and the Future of Moldova Party. At a Victory Bloc congress on July 6, 2025, held in Moscow, Russia, the bloc's leader, fugitive Moldovan oligarch, Ilan Shor, stated that he wanted Evghenia Guțul, the governor of Gagauzia, to be the head of the Victory Bloc's electoral list for the 2025 parliamentary elections. At the time, Guțul was under investigation for two criminal cases and was under house arrest. Ilan Shor also stated at the same congress that he believed that the "only salvation" for Moldova was "union with the Russian Federation" and that "it makes no sense to talk about the country's independence", adding the comment "one currency, one parliament".

As relations between Chisinau and the autonomous region of Gagauzia have deteriorated, Tiraspol increasingly views and labels the Moldovan government's stance as coercive rather than conciliatory. From Tiraspol's perspective, EU alignment appears not as an invitation to dialogue but as a vehicle for marginalization. Its primary interest lies in preserving the status quo – particularly the export of goods manufactured with subsidized Russian gas and relabeled under Moldovan customs. As Moldova moves forward with EU integration and adopts stricter regulatory standards, this arrangement will become increasingly difficult to sustain. The Moldovan government has opened informal channels of communication with Tiraspol to clarify what EU accession would mean in practice – particularly for businesses operating under Moldovan customs. But these consultations remain constrained by structural limitations and a lack of trust on both sides. The energy crisis of early 2025 was resolved by a temporary solution, but one that placed Transnistria more directly under Moscow's control. This outcome underscores not only the severity of Russia's control over the region, but also its waning confidence – both in Tiraspol's ability to manage its own affairs and in the Kremlin's ability to shape Moldovan dynamics through traditional means.

The overarching objective that has become a priority is that Moldova's path to the EU will continue after the elections: its pace will depend more on Brussels' willingness to expand than on Chisinau's willingness to reform. An opposition-led coalition government remains highly unlikely, even if PAS fails to secure an outright

⁶ He has held and still holds certain significant positions during the period 01.02.2009-present, such as: project manager and secretary general within the National Youth Council of Moldova; affiliated expert within the NATO Information and Documentation Center in the Republic of Moldova; he has held various positions in the Soros-Moldova Foundation; during the same period he was a member of the Central Electoral Commission and an advisor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova in the field of combating corruption; and since 02.06.2022 he has been the director of SIS.

majority. The affiliation with Ilan Shor has become both dangerous and disadvantageous, and politically toxic, while Russia's war in Ukraine has made any overtly pro-Russian course untenable for serious political actors in the region. In the current regional security climate, the greater risk lies not in a reversal of integration, but in escalating internal tensions – possibly even the outbreak of conflict – if the electoral process is mismanaged, which Russia could exploit to its full potential. The opposition lacks both financial capital and organizational capacity. A profound demographic shift – accompanied by significant general and attitudinal shifts – continues to tilt the electorate towards Europe. However, issues such as constitutional neutrality and widespread socio-economic grievances, particularly those related to energy policy, remain deeply relevant to the electoral process on September 28. These concerns should not be dismissed as “pro-Russian”. They reflect real anxieties among voters, especially outside the urban middle class. With EU support, growing domestic awareness and a determined civil society, the country has a chance to resist and elect a parliament that supports a democratic future on the path to EU integration. The elections, which Brussels will closely monitor, will also help define Europe's ability to extend its promise of strengthening democracy, stability and dignity to those still struggling to secure and develop them.

In Conclusion, We Can Highlight.....

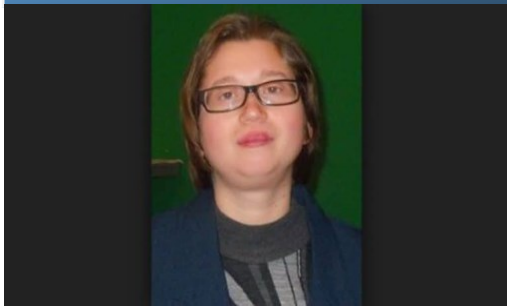
Chisinau, a bastion of pro-European sentiment, now becomes a key electoral battleground on September 28. Although the city of Chisinau has been a traditionally favorable entity for PAS, Mayor I. Ceban also remains very popular, being credited with overseeing a visible modernization and beautification of the city. However, there is no substantial and very clear evidence regarding the orientation of the Alternativa Bloc that it has a pro-Russian orientation or that it enjoys the full support of the Kremlin in a way comparable to Ilan Shor or the Socialist Party.

It should not be overlooked that the Kremlin has multiple tactical entry points into Moldovan domestic politics through its powerful set of financial resources, nostalgia, deep-rooted social and political networks, and the ability to instill fear. Financial and informational support from Russia could also be channeled to amplify certain political narratives or fuel public protests. However, in the absence of major government wrongdoing—such as verifiable electoral fraud, which the pro-Russian opposition already preemptively alleges—the likelihood of large-scale unrest still seems limited, especially given Russia's ongoing military escalation in Ukraine. While rumors of election fraud persist—especially now more than ever around diaspora voting, which some see as structurally unfair despite its legal status—no concrete evidence has emerged to support these claims. Russia's war in Ukraine, combined with the accelerated EU integration trajectories of both Moldova and Ukraine, has fundamentally reshaped the strategic context for the breakaway entity of Transnistria. Since the large-scale Russian invasion, Transnistrian authorities in Tiraspol have quietly signaled a degree of openness toward reintegration. However, Chisinau has opted to prioritize the path to EU accession, effectively treating Transnistria as a frozen anomaly to be avoided, not resolved now but, most likely, later. Dominated by the private and historical conglomerate, the Transnistrian entity has little interest in the arrival of a so-called “Russian world” on the Dniester River. Instead, it maintains a neo-Soviet aesthetic to satisfy local nostalgia while defending its so-called fundamental economic privileges favored by Moscow.

Further compounding the opposition's weakness is its exclusion from the Western-funded civil society ecosystem and from European institutional channels: spaces dominated by PAS and its affiliates. Beyond the formalities of the EU accession process, Moldova's political system urgently needs renewal: more political diversity, greater institutional accountability, and a more socially responsive economic framework. PAS has relied heavily on civil society to compensate for the state's limited capacity, but this approach risks further emptying Moldova's already fragile mechanisms of civic oversight and pluralistic politics. However, a model of success built on security, identity politics, political monopoly, and administrative pressure may yet prove unsustainable in its entirety. European standards – democratic pluralism, institutional resilience, and social cohesion – should remain the point of reference. As such, on September 28, 2025, Moldova will decide again whether to continue on its European path or move closer to Russia. According to the speaker of parliament, Igor Grosu, the elections on September 28 will be “crucial” in deciding the future of the Republic of Moldova. “Either we throw away everything we have achieved on our path to modernization and EU integration, or we move forward towards peace and development,” said I. Grosu. “Our goal is to ensure that Moldova remains on the path to peace, avoids falling under the influence of the Kremlin, and preserves its sovereignty and freedom,” he added.

Currently, in the same context as the parliamentary elections on September 28 approach, the Republic of Moldova is defending itself against an intense barrage of Russian hybrid attacks. It has managed to maintain the line of balance and prevent Russia from undermining its Western trajectory. It has also managed to move forward with reforms. However, this progress does not yet generate effects that could be classified as inevitable or irreversible. If Russia were to succeed in its hybrid warfare, this would undermine and delay progress and would have extremely negative consequences for the whole of Europe and European security. The West has an interest in supporting Moldova in strengthening its capacity to take countermeasures and build its resilience against Russian interference. However, this is not a one-way relationship, as the West also has much to learn from Moldova's experience, tactics and countermeasures. While Moldova is on the front line of these hybrid attacks, Russia is using similar tactics to varying degrees throughout Europe and in the US. Moreover, Russia's attacks on Moldova directly affect the EU, as seen in the hybrid operations in Paris. The European Council's decision to grant Moldova candidate status and open accession negotiations signifies a major geopolitical commitment to Moldova's security. In such a context, it has become more necessary than ever for the EU to double the commitment inherent in its offer with a solid security commitment and support for Moldova's fight against Russia's hybrid warfare.

EUROPE



Does Russia Pose a Military Threat to Europe Due to Its War Experience in Ukraine?

Mona AGRIGOROAIEI (Romania)

The military threat posed by Russia to Europe cannot be treated simplistically. It is real, complex and changes from year to year depending on the economic, political and strategic context. The experience of the war in Ukraine has provided Russia with a kind of practical manual of modern conflict, but it has also brought it enormous losses that reduce its capacity for future expansion. The future will depend on how Europe manages to remain united, to invest in security, but also in culture, education, truth and dignity.

The military danger from Russia, amplified by the experience of the war in Ukraine, should neither be exaggerated nor minimized. It must be understood in depth, analysed with maturity and managed with firmness and intelligence. Only in this way can Europe preserve its lasting peace, without losing the fundamental principles that define its identity.

Any serious analysis of Europe's security in the face of Russia must take into account not only tanks and missiles, but also non-military threats that, in many cases, can be just as dangerous, if not more insidious.

The tense relations between Russia and Europe have a long and complex history, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has brought concerns about continental security back into focus. Although the Western world hoped for a long period of cooperation and stability after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia's actions in recent decades have consistently shown that its geopolitical ambitions have not disappeared. Europe has suddenly found itself in a situation where a large-scale conventional war is being waged on its borders, and this reality has changed the way threats are analysed.

In recent years, Russia has not only demonstrated military aggression, but has also become an unpredictable actor on the international stage, using its army as a tool of intimidation.

Many politicians, generals, military analysts and even ordinary citizens are wondering whether, after gaining military experience in Ukraine, Russia may pose an even greater threat to the rest of Europe. This question is not just theoretical, but has real implications for defence policies, state budgets, and the general sense of security of people on the continent.

In Ukraine, the Russian army has gone through a series of bloody confrontations that have given it first-hand experience in an intensive modern conflict. At first, Russia's advantage seemed undeniable due to the large number of troops, its considered advanced equipment, and its military reputation. However, the



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reality of the war proved to be much more complicated. Even though massive losses occurred, Russian commanders had to learn on the fly, adapt their strategies, and find new ways to continue the offensive. This adaptation sometimes led to more efficient tactical operations, such as the use of drones, organizing rotational attacks, and testing state-of-the-art weapons.

The experience gained in this war has trained new officers with real practical knowledge, which from a military point of view can gradually transform the army into one that is better prepared for future confrontations. The fact that Russia has maintained the front for so long proves that it can sustain a long-term conflict, which is causing concern among many European countries. However, each step forward for Russia has come with huge losses, which has raised questions about its long-term resilience. Never since World War II has Russia lost so many tanks and armoured vehicles in such a short time. Human losses are estimated by many international sources to be in the hundreds of thousands, and the psychological wounds on soldiers and their families are difficult to assess. Damaged or destroyed equipment must be replaced, and ammunition stocks are rapidly dwindling, forcing Russia to resort to alliances with other states such as Iran or North Korea to obtain weapons and ammunition. All this is putting enormous pressure on the state budget and military production capacity. Although Russia continues to produce weapons and mobilize troops, the quality of human resources is gradually declining due to forced mobilizations, and the civilian population is increasingly feeling the burden of war.

At the same time, Europe's reaction has been spectacular and surprisingly unified. Countries that have been cutting military spending for years have suddenly decided to rebuild their armies and invest massively in defence technologies. Germany, historically reserved about weapons, announced the largest rearmament plan in recent decades, allocating huge funds to modernize military equipment. Eastern European states such as Poland and Romania not only host NATO troops but have also purchased modern air defence and missile systems from the United States. Countries such as Finland and Sweden have also abandoned their neutrality and applied to join NATO, strengthening the Alliance's northern front. This strengthening of the Western alliance sends a clear message: if Russia were to try to expand the conflict beyond Ukraine, it would encounter much stronger collective resistance.

Although many people believe that Russia would not risk directly attacking a NATO country, the reality is that Russia remains a real military threat to Europe, even if not an absolute and invincible one. The experience of the war in Ukraine has provided Russia with important knowledge of modern tactics, but it has also revealed structural and economic limits that are difficult to ignore. At the same time, Europe has become more united, better prepared and aware of the need for collective defense. The threat exists in many forms: military, hybrid, cyber and nuclear, and Russia will continue to test European vulnerabilities. As long as European states remain united, invest in defense and keep the NATO alliance strong, the danger can be controlled and deterred. The painful lesson from Ukraine has shown that peace is not something guaranteed, but must be actively protected every day. That is why, even if Russia has accumulated military experience, Europe has the resources and collective intelligence to face this challenge and preserve the stability of the continent.

The possibility of peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia is a theoretical option, but extremely complex, because any agreement must balance the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine with the security interests of Europe. In a negotiating scenario, guaranteeing peace could not be just a verbal commitment, but would require concrete mechanisms for international verification and monitoring, including through organizations such as the UN or the OSCE. In this context, the security guarantees offered to Ukraine – through alliances, defensive military support, technological cooperation and preventive sanctions against the aggressor – are not only beneficial for Ukraine, but also directly contribute to the stability of the whole of Europe. Protecting Ukraine's borders limits the expansion of aggression and creates a precedent that discourages similar attempts against other European states. Thus, Ukraine's security becomes a pillar of European collective security, demonstrating that lasting peace cannot be achieved without a framework of regional protection and solidarity.

A possible future scenario is that Russia, after the end or freezing of the conflict in Ukraine, tries to use the experience of the war to rebuild its army in a more modern and disciplined form. Although exhausted, Russia could learn from its mistakes and could invest in new technologies, such as autonomous drones, hypersonic missiles or advanced electronic systems. In this context, Europe should remain vigilant, because the transition from one conflict to another could transform Russia into a perhaps even more aggressive, but more effectively organized power.

It is possible that, after a short period of strategic withdrawal, Russia could try to reassert its military influence in former Soviet republics such as Moldova, Georgia or even in the Baltic region, through military pressure, energy blackmail or the insinuation of troops at the borders.

Another scenario could be that Russia, weary of war and faced with severe economic sanctions and internal unrest, increasingly loses its capacity for external military action. In this case, the threat would gradually decrease, but would not disappear altogether, since a wounded empire can be even more unpredictable. In such a situation, the Russian state could resort to desperate strategies, including intensifying cyberattacks or attempts to provoke artificial migration crises in Europe, in order to destabilize Western societies. Likewise, in order to maintain its internal control, the Russian authorities could resort to militaristic rhetoric and anti-Western propaganda, maintaining a state of permanent tension, even if the resources for a conventional attack were to diminish. This type of threat, even if it did not involve tanks, would continue to loom like a shadow over European security.

A more pessimistic scenario, but one that cannot be completely ignored, is one in which Russia, through strategic alliances with China, Iran, or even North Korea, manages to quickly rebuild its military resources and obtain technological and financial support from abroad. In this case, Russia could once again become a competitive military force, capable of directly threatening NATO's eastern flank or even creating new hotbeds of conflict in Europe. If the Russian economy were artificially supported by authoritarian partners, Moscow would have the courage to provoke tensions on the borders of Poland, Lithuania, or Romania, counting on the fact that a tired Western alliance could split over a common response. This is one of the great fears of Western strategists, who insist that Europe remain united and capable of responding quickly to external aggression.

In an optimistic scenario, tensions may ease after a possible peace agreement in Ukraine, and Russia may enter a phase of internal reconstruction, setting aside its expansionist ambitions. The younger generation in Russia could generate pressure for democratic change, which would reduce the appetite for militarism and confrontation. In this case, Europe could begin a phase of gradual reconciliation, while still maintaining a solid defensive posture. However, even in such a positive scenario, it would be necessary for Europeans not to repeat the mistakes of the past, when they believed that peace was guaranteed and neglected investments in the military. Even if Russia appears more peaceful, the lesson of the war in Ukraine should remain deeply rooted in the collective memory, to avoid future surprises.

The world may be entering a new era of global geopolitical competition, in which Russia will no longer be the sole adversary, but only part of a larger authoritarian bloc. In this case, Europe will have to prepare not only to defend itself against Russia, but also to cope with a multipolar world full of tensions. Russia, taking advantage of its experience in Ukraine, could act as a military pawn in a global anti-Western alliance, which would amplify the risks. For this reason, the future of Europe will depend not only on classical military force, but also on the ability to innovate technologically, strengthen the resilience of societies, combat propaganda and maintain cohesion between diverse nations with different interests.

All these possible scenarios make it clear that the future of Europe depends to a large extent on how the countries of the continent will continue to collaborate and remain vigilant against Russia's authoritarian and aggressive tendencies. Even though Russia will face growing domestic economic and political problems, it should not be underestimated that a determined and expansionist leader can sacrifice years of domestic prosperity just to maintain external influence and create the illusion of great power.

Europe, which has learned painfully through history that ignoring imperialist ambitions leads to tragedies, must combine diplomacy with military force in an intelligent policy of deterrence. There is no need for panic, but there is a need for lucidity, because the experience of the war in Ukraine has transformed Russia into an adversary that, even weakened, is more pragmatic, more adaptive and perhaps more willing to resort to unconventional means to achieve its goals.

Another fundamental element is the mentality of future generations, both in Russia and in Europe. If the young European generation is educated in the spirit of peace, but also of defending freedom, and the young Russian generation begins to challenge propaganda and seek a more democratic direction, then in the long run the military danger may decrease considerably. But if Russian propaganda continues to promote the idea that Europe is the eternal enemy, and Europe becomes indifferent or compassionate, the latent conflict could flare up again at any time. It is important to understand that a war does not begin only when the first bombs fall, but from the moment when mentalities are prepared for hatred, fear and confrontation. Therefore, in addition to tanks and missiles, education, the culture of dialogue, spiritual resilience and the unity of democratic values are of enormous importance.

From a personal point of view, I believe that Europe must maintain its balance between firmness and diplomacy. It must not respond to aggression with blind aggression, but neither must it give the illusion that it is weak or indecisive. Russia, even if it has gained military experience in Ukraine, is not invincible. In fact, it was precisely through this war that Russia showed its limits, both technological and moral. But at the same

time, this conflict demonstrated that Russia is willing to go to extreme lengths to achieve its goals, even at the cost of sanctions and isolation. Europe must make a continuous effort to dialogue where possible, but also be prepared for unpleasant scenarios. Deterrence does not mean a desire for war, but protecting peace through the combined power of military technology, political cohesion and common values.

The military threat posed by Russia to Europe cannot be treated simplistically. It is real, complex and changes from year to year depending on the economic, political and strategic context. The experience of the war in Ukraine has provided Russia with a kind of practical manual of modern conflict, but it has also brought enormous losses that reduce its capacity for future expansion. The future will depend on how Europe manages to remain united, to invest in security, but also in culture, education, truth and dignity.

Peace is not something that comes by itself, but is the result of constant vigilance and a common ideal. As long as Europe understands this and does not repeat the mistakes of the past, even if Russia continues to pose a threat, that threat can be contained and neutralized through collective intelligence and genuine solidarity. In the long term, the question of whether Russia remains a military threat to Europe is not only about what happens on the Ukrainian front, but also about how the world will evolve in terms of values and the global balance of power. If the international system continues to be based on rules, treaties, institutions and strong alliances, then the influence of a state like Russia, which relies predominantly on brute force and intimidation, will automatically decline. But if the world enters a phase of geopolitical chaos, in which each state acts according to its own interests without regard to the rules, then Russia could take advantage of this general disorder to impose its will through coercion. Therefore, protecting the international legal system and solidarity between democracies is an essential part of the security strategy for Europe.

Another aspect worth reflecting on is the fact that, for Russia, war is not only a military action, but also a form of national identity. Russian propaganda promotes the idea that the greatness of the nation is built through sacrifice and conflict, and victory becomes a central element of collective pride. While Europe sees war as a tragedy to be avoided, in Russia there is sometimes a glorification of violence and military heroism. This cultural difference also transforms the perception of security: Europe wants stability, Russia seeks recognition through force. For this reason, even if the Russian army were temporarily weakened, the confrontational mentality remains, which maintains a constant level of danger on Europe's borders and fuels an atmosphere of permanent tension.

We cannot ignore the fact that Russia has enormous natural resources – oil, gas, rare minerals – and control of this wealth provides it with an additional means of geopolitical blackmail. If in the near future Europe were to enter an energy or economic crisis, Russia could once again use the weapon of energy supplies to divide European states among themselves. Thus, the military danger is never completely separate from the economic one. A Europe that is energy dependent on Russia automatically becomes vulnerable, and this can limit the capacity for political and military reaction in the event of a crisis. For this reason, energy diversification, investment in renewable energy and reducing dependence on Russian resources are part of the same national security strategy, even if at first glance they seem to be separate areas.

It should not be forgotten that Russia has a huge nuclear arsenal, and its military doctrine allows for the use of tactical nuclear weapons in crisis situations. Even if a nuclear war would be devastating for the entire planet, the existence of these weapons changes the way risks are calculated. Europe must take this reality into account and be prepared to respond not only to a conventional attack, but also to nuclear threats or the possibility of an intentional or accidental nuclear accident. True political maturity does not mean just having soldiers and tanks, but having clear plans for the worst-case scenarios, so that the population feels protected even in extreme situations. That is why civil defense exercises, warning systems and nuclear diplomacy are as important as classic military strategies. Europe must understand that security is not only the responsibility of political leaders or armies, but also of civil society. Citizens must be aware, informed, able to distinguish truth from manipulation, willing to defend democratic values even in times of crisis. Only a united and resilient society can face an external threat such as that posed by Russia, no matter how much experience of war it may have. Thus, the war in Ukraine becomes not only a military lesson, but also a lesson of collective responsibility for the whole of Europe: if we want peace, we must be prepared for anything and never forget how quickly freedoms can be lost when nations are not vigilant. After all, the true strength of Europe lies not only in armaments or alliances, but in the capacity of people to remain united in the face of fear and to defend what they have built together over generations.

The European Union has developed a common security and defense policy to respond to the increasingly complex challenges in its neighborhood, in particular the threats emanating from Russia. This policy aims not only to strengthen military capabilities, but also to promote strategic coordination between Member States, exchange information and create common rapid reaction mechanisms. The experience of the conflict in

Ukraine has shown that the stability of Europe cannot be guaranteed by a single state, but only through collective action and solidarity between members. In addition to military capabilities, European security policy emphasizes the resilience of societies in the face of hybrid and non-military threats. Disinformation, cyber-attacks and external political interference can destabilize Member States, just as Russia has tried to influence the situation in Ukraine. The Union must be prepared to prevent and counter these attacks through common instruments, in order to protect both domestic democracies and continental cohesion. Military cooperation between Member States is an essential pillar of the common security policy. Rapid reaction units, joint military exercises and technological interoperability allow the EU to respond promptly in the event of direct or indirect attacks. In addition, collaboration with NATO ensures a double level of protection, combining European resources with the collective guarantees of the North Atlantic Alliance, creating a solid shield against aggression.

The threat from Russia is constant and complex. Direct military aggression, disinformation campaigns and political pressure on its neighbors demonstrate Moscow's intention to influence the European security balance.

Therefore, the common policy must be proactive, not reactive, based on prevention, rapid reaction capacity and continuous cooperation between Member States.

A crucial aspect is the protection of critical infrastructures, such as energy, communications and transport. Attacks on these areas can destabilize entire societies, and a common European strategy allows preventing disruptions that could affect the entire region. Continuity plans and the development of resilient infrastructure thus become fundamental elements of European security.

Cyber and information security is another essential pillar. The experience of Ukraine has shown that a state can be destabilized without a traditional armed conflict. The EU must develop common cyber defense capabilities, through cooperation between national agencies, the private sector and international bodies, to counter digital attacks and information manipulation. Political solidarity between Member States strengthens the effectiveness of the common policy. The threat from Russia cannot be managed by a single state, and common decisions, coordinated sanctions and mutual support send a clear signal to the aggressor: Europe remains united and vigilant. This solidarity transforms the security guarantees offered to Ukraine into indirect protection for the whole of Europe.

The common policy must be flexible and adaptable to new forms of conflict. Hybrid wars, political influences and economic pressures require rapid and coordinated response mechanisms. Collaboration with civil society, the private sector and international organizations increases resilience and reduces the vulnerability of Member States. Joint investments in defense and military technology allow the EU to develop autonomous capabilities and reduce dependence on third parties. This strategic autonomy not only strengthens internal security, but also provides a deterrent effect against external aggression, demonstrating that the Union can protect collective interests without relying exclusively on others. The EU's common security policy is essential for protecting Europe from the Russian threat.

By strengthening military and hybrid capabilities, societal resilience and political solidarity, the security of a threatened state such as Ukraine becomes a component of European collective security. The lessons of this context show that only through unity, preparedness and cooperation can peace and freedom be maintained on the continent.

Another important perspective is related to how the other great powers of the world relate to Russia and Europe. For example, the United States remains Europe's main ally within NATO, and the support provided to Ukraine has been crucial so far, both militarily and economically. If in the future, for domestic political reasons, the attention of the United States were to diminish or be focused on other regions, such as the Pacific and the competition with China, Europe could be forced to assume even more responsibility for its own security. In this context, Russia could take advantage of any sign of American hesitation to test European resolve. This scenario shows how interconnected global security is and how important it is for Europe not to depend exclusively on external partners, but to develop its own collective defense capacity. Russia is likely to experience regime change within itself if popular discontent grows so much that the current leadership can no longer control the situation. Such a period of internal political chaos could create both opportunities for democratic reform and enormous risks, because when a nuclear state becomes unstable, there is always the danger that military forces will react unpredictably. In such a context, Europe would have to monitor the situation very closely and be prepared for unexpected crises, including massive flows of refugees, arms smuggling, or even an accidental military incident at the border.

On the other hand, the experience of the Ukrainian army can also be an important balancing factor. Ukraine has become a laboratory of modern resistance, using Western technology, artificial intelligence, and

an impressive form of citizen mobilization. If Ukraine becomes an integral part of the European security system in the future, this experience can be transformed into a strategic advantage for the whole of Europe. Ukrainian soldiers and generals, trained in extreme conditions, can contribute to strengthening European defense. Thus, what Russia hoped would be a show of force could turn into an unprecedented strengthening of European defense, in which populations across the continent become more aware of the need to defend freedom. The moral dimension of the conflict should not be ignored either. Europe is not fighting just for borders or resources, but for values: democracy, freedom, human rights, national sovereignty. Russia, through its rhetoric, presents these values as “decadent Western ideas,” which shows how different the ideological foundations of the two worlds are. The war thus also becomes a confrontation between two types of civilization: an open one, based on law and rights, and an authoritarian one, based on force and fear. In this sense, the experience of Ukraine serves as a warning that European values are not guaranteed, but must be defended through political will and through cohesion between states.

Psychologically, the Russian threat may also have the opposite effect: it may awaken in Europe a stronger sense of solidarity and common identity than ever before. If society becomes convinced that there is a real danger, people begin to value peace more and support defensive measures. This change in mentality is already visible in many countries where, until recently, the army was perceived as a symbolic institution. Today, more and more young Europeans understand that freedom is not a gift, but a right that must be protected, and this collective awareness could be one of the greatest achievements of the current generation. Thus, even if Russia poses a threat, its unintended effect could be to strengthen Europe not only militarily but also spiritually. It should also not be overlooked that technology is evolving very quickly, and the wars of the future could be radically different from those of today. While Russia has gained experience in Ukraine with artillery and drones, Europe is investing heavily in cutting-edge weapons, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and space defense. If these technologies are intelligently integrated into European defense doctrines, Russia could fall behind, unable to keep up. Because a state is not strong only by the number of soldiers, but by the ability to use technology and information in a superior way. The future may belong to those who adapt the fastest to new types of conflict, and Europe has the advantage of a strong economy and cooperation between researchers, engineers, and militaries from dozens of states. There is also the possibility that in the future Russia will try to reform its military based on what it has learned in Ukraine, reducing corruption, modernizing logistics, and preparing more mobile and better trained units. If this happens, the military threat could even intensify. That is why Europe must anticipate and not wait until Russia has fully recovered its capabilities. Precisely to prevent such a development, it is essential that economic sanctions remain effective and that Russia constantly feels the cost of its aggression. When an aggressor state does not pay a high price for its actions, it becomes emboldened to repeat the behavior. The lesson of history shows that wars occur not when a state is strong, but when its opponents seem weak or indecisive.

Each European state has its own interests and its own internal problems: economic, social, political. Sometimes these differences can lead to tensions and misunderstandings between the member states of the European Union or NATO. Russia often tries to exploit these cracks, supporting certain political groups within European countries or trying to create dissensions between the West and the East. If Europe fails to overcome its internal conflicts and maintain a common front, then Russia could use this division as a weapon, without having to fire a single shot. Therefore, the political unity of Europe becomes an essential condition for its long-term military security. It must be emphasized that Russia is a huge country, with a large population and an ancient military culture. Even if it is suffering losses today, it has the potential to recover in the long term, especially if the leadership finds ways to motivate the population and eliminate corrupt elements. Ignoring this possibility would be a strategic mistake. Europe must be prepared even for the scenario in which Russia fully recovers in 10-15 years and tries to expand its influence again. That is precisely why European strategic planning must not be limited to the present, but must also look at the medium and long term. This means constant investment in defense, but also in education, resilience and energy independence.

Any discussion about Russia and Europe must also take into account the human factor. Russians and Europeans are peoples who have lived on the same continent for centuries, exchanging culture, literature, and science. It is possible that one day relations will return to normal, and cooperation will be possible again, but this depends on Russia renouncing imperialism and accepting the modern values of international law. Until then, vigilance remains essential.

The military danger from Russia, amplified by the experience of the war in Ukraine, should neither be exaggerated nor minimized. It must be understood in depth, analyzed with maturity, and managed with firmness and intelligence. Only in this way can Europe preserve its lasting peace, without losing the fundamental principles that define its identity.

Any serious analysis of Europe's security in the face of Russia must take into account not only tanks and missiles, but also non-military threats that, in many cases, can be just as dangerous, if not more insidious.

In the modern era, war is no longer fought only on the physical battlefield, but also on *the mental*, informational and cultural fields. Russia has shown that it knows how to use propaganda, media manipulation, fake news and disinformation techniques to weaken people's trust in their own governments. The resilience of European society depends on the ability of citizens to recognize these attempts and to remain united around the truth and common values.

One of the most dangerous forms of modern warfare is precisely information warfare, an essential part of what is called hybrid warfare. Through social platforms, fake accounts or controlled media, Russia can inject the messages it wants into European societies. The goal is not only to convince people, but above all to create confusion, distrust and division. If society becomes divided, if people no longer trust institutions, then even the most powerful army becomes difficult to coordinate. Resilience, in this case, means media education, access to accurate information, independent journalists and citizens who think critically.

Among Moscow's favorite tools is also supporting far-right parties or radical anti-European movements. These groups become real "Trojan horses" inside Western democracies, because under the guise of patriotism they actually promote ideas that weaken the European Union and favor the interests of the Kremlin. Some of these parties receive, directly or indirectly, funds from the East, have connections with Russian propaganda and use a discourse that is strikingly similar to the anti-Western messages spread by the Russian media. If they gain ground, they can block important decisions in national parliaments, destabilize governments and reduce support for Ukraine. To be resilient, Europe must not only combat threats militarily, but also protect its democratic structure against these ideological infiltrations. This means, first and foremost, investing in civic education and a healthy public debate, in which citizens are encouraged to express their opinions, but also to expose manipulation. It also means having full financial transparency on the financing of political parties, to prevent foreign influences. If radical politicians are secretly sponsored by hostile states, democracy becomes vulnerable from within, which can be even more dangerous than a classic military threat.

Another facet of hybrid warfare is the use of cyberattacks on critical infrastructure: hospitals, banks, power grids, transportation systems. Europe has already experienced such attacks, some directly attributed to Russian hacker groups. If one day communications are disrupted or medical systems are paralyzed by cyberattacks, the psychological effect on the population can be devastating. That is why cyber resilience – that is, cyber preparedness, emergency protocols and securing digital networks – has become a fundamental part of national security in any modern country.

Russia also often takes advantage of existing social tensions, such as dissatisfaction with migration, economic crises, fear of globalization, to fuel distrust in European institutions. Russian propaganda campaigns amplify these problems, presenting the European Union as weak, corrupt or led by elites who have "forgotten about the people". This narrative is immediately taken up by extremist parties, who present themselves as the saviors of the nation and demand the severance of ties with Europe. The resilience of a society means, in this case, the ability to manage these internal problems through real social policies, dialogue with citizens and economic policies that reduce inequalities. If citizens trust their state, then foreign propaganda becomes much less effective. To face hybrid warfare, Europe must have a coordinated response system between countries: rapid exchange of information, cooperation between intelligence services, a common mechanism to combat cyberattacks. It is not enough for each state to defend itself separately, because the threat is transnational. Russia can attack infrastructure in a state with weaker rules, in order to indirectly hit the rest of the continent. Solidarity in the face of these non-military threats becomes an important test of European cohesion. Thus, resilience is not only a national task, but also a collective and supranational one.

It is important to understand that right-wing extremism is not only dangerous through its discourse, but also through its potential for domestic violence. Radical groups can be manipulated by foreign services, can receive ideological support from Russia, and can act to destabilize their own country. If in a period of crisis these groups organize violent protests, disorder, or even acts of sabotage, they create the image of a weak and divided Europe, which suits Moscow.

Therefore, Europe's security in the coming decades will also depend on its ability to combat domestic radicalization, hate speech, and riots orchestrated by extremist groups that play the role of true "Trojan horses."

A resilient society is one that knows its own cracks, but constantly works to repair them. In the face of hybrid warfare, Europe needs a culture of civil vigilance, where people know how to check sources before

believing sensational news, where schools teach young people about manipulation, propaganda and critical thinking. The state must also provide transparency and clear communication, so that the population does not feel the need to search for the “truth” in obscure websites controlled from outside. If citizens feel that the state is hiding the truth from them, they become vulnerable to conspiracy theories, which are precisely the fertile soil that Russian propaganda uses to plant distrust.

All these forms of resilience must be thought of in the long term. It is not something that can be built in a year, but it is a culture of democratic security that must be passed down from generation to generation. The pandemic, the economic crises, climate change and now the war in Ukraine show that Europe can be hit from several directions at the same time. If the democratic system manages to remain calm, protect freedoms, maintain order and respond quickly, then even a treacherous enemy like Russia will not be able to truly destabilize the continent. Resilience is, therefore, an invisible shield that is built through public trust, education, justice and civic courage.

Europe’s real strength in the face of non-military threats is not just technology or cyber espionage, but the fact that millions of people believe in the same values and are willing to defend them. If those values remain alive – freedom, democracy, solidarity – then neither hybrid warfare, nor extremist parties, nor propaganda manipulations can truly win.

Europe must protect its borders, but also the minds and hearts of its citizens. And this makes resilience an element of European identity: not just to be protected, but to be aware, united and prepared, both against tanks and against toxic ideas coming from outside. Thus, even if Russia tries to act as a Trojan horse in European societies, this threat can be neutralized through light, truth and community.

The future of European resilience depends not only on rapid reactions to crises, but also on anticipating them through proactive policies. Europe must learn to detect early signals of destabilization, whether they come from foreign propaganda, political infiltration or cyber-attacks. This anticipation requires scientific research, intelligence gathering and collaboration between institutions, so that decisions are not reactive but calculated. In an increasingly complex security environment, not being prepared means being vulnerable to subtle manipulations that can have major effects.

Another essential dimension of resilience is social cohesion. Divided societies, with deep economic inequalities or cultural tensions, become fertile ground for external influence. Right-wing extremism thrives where citizens feel abandoned or marginalized. Russia or other hostile states exploit these fissures, promoting narratives that fuel hatred and mistrust. Strengthening social cohesion, through inclusive policies, intercultural dialogue and civic education, is not only a moral ideal, but an element of strategic security. Contemporary hybrid warfare has shown that the boundaries between war and peace are extremely flexible. A disinformation campaign can destabilize a country’s economy, reduce trust in its government or block key political decisions without a single shot being fired.

Europe needs to develop legal and institutional mechanisms that allow for a rapid response to such situations. Legislation, collaboration between member states and continuous monitoring of the information environment thus become as important defense tools as the army. Political extremism, especially far-right extremism, represents a strategic risk from within. Radical groups can be manipulated to act as proxies for external powers, affecting domestic decisions and destabilizing society. In some cases, even if the leaders of these groups do not explicitly pursue the interests of the Kremlin, their ideology aligns with Russian propaganda, creating a situation in which Europe becomes vulnerable to influence without the need for direct invasion.

Resilience is not built only at the macro level, but also at the micro level, through individual and collective education. Citizens must develop critical thinking skills, recognize manipulation and actively participate in democratic life. Every educated and aware individual becomes a “shield” against hybrid attacks, reducing the room for maneuver of external propaganda.

This highlights the importance of schools, universities and civic organizations as pillars of non-military security. When it comes to cybersecurity, Europe needs to invest heavily in resilient infrastructure and data protection. Attacks on electricity, financial or healthcare networks can quickly paralyse modern societies, generating panic and distrust. Transnational collaboration, sharing information about attacks and constant simulations become essential. Without these measures, hybrid warfare can have effects comparable to military invasion, without people immediately noticing who is responsible.

Another element of strategic importance is international cohesion within the European Union and NATO. Hybrid threats are difficult to combat if each state acts in isolation. Information sharing, standardization of security protocols and the development of common strategies allow Europe to respond quickly and effectively, reducing vulnerabilities that can be exploited by Russia or other hostile states. The strength of alliances thus becomes an essential element of resilience. Europe must also be prepared to counter subtle attacks on the economy and public opinion. Market manipulation, disinformation campaigns about financial or social crises, or even support for

violent protests through hidden networks are tools of modern warfare. The response must be coordinated, rapid and adapted, combining economic, legal measures and strategic communication. Ignoring these attacks can turn a minor crisis into a long-term disaster.

Europe's resilience depends on a deep understanding of the interdependencies between society, economy, security and geopolitics. Every vulnerability exploited by an external actor can have knock-on effects, and every well-thought-out protective measure can prevent major crises. Europe must build not only physical fortifications, but also invisible structures of social, educational, economic and digital resilience. Only in this way can it turn hybrid threats and right-wing extremism into surmountable obstacles, preserving its stability and fundamental values in the face of external pressures. The struggle of the Ukrainian people against external aggression demonstrates that freedom is not a privilege, but a right that requires constant defense and collective commitment. Social solidarity, individual courage and civic mobilization have allowed Ukraine to resist an enemy superior in brute force, showing that internal unity and strong will are fundamental in defending democratic values.

Europe can learn from this experience that freedom is maintained through determination, preparation and cohesion, not just through alliances or diplomatic negotiations. Resistance to the occupier is not limited to the battlefield. In Ukraine, citizens protected vital infrastructure, countered disinformation and maintained the democratic spirit even under the pressure of invasion. These lessons are essential for European states facing hybrid or non-military threats: social cohesion, civic education and active participation become pillars of national resilience. The ability to react quickly and in a coordinated manner to complex challenges is as important as military force. Ultimately, Europe must understand that freedom and independence are not guaranteed by borders or armies, but by the collective will of citizens to defend fundamental values against any type of occupier – military, political or ideological. The lessons of Ukraine show that resistance is an ongoing process, a commitment to affirming national dignity and identity. By strengthening internal solidarity and cooperation between states, Europe can transform these lessons into sustainable strategies that ensure not only security, but also the perpetuation of the fundamental values of freedom and democracy for future generations.

EUROPE—INDIA



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Green Horizons: EU-India Unite for a Net-Zero Future

The climate emergency is unfolding with unprecedented urgency; science clearly shows that to avoid the impacts of climate change and preserve a habitable planet, global temperature increase must be limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Today, the planet is already 1.2 degrees Celsius warmer than in the 19th century. According to the Paris Agreement, to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius, emissions must be cut by 45% by 2023 and reach zero by 2050¹.

The European Union (EU) has set a legally binding target of climate neutrality by 2050 under its Green Deal, while India's goal is to reach net-zero by 2070². In this regard, the EU-India partnership emerges as a strategic alliance. Through joint initiatives such as the EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (2016) and recent cooperation on green hydrogen and critical minerals, the partnership demonstrates how technology transfer, financing and policy innovation can serve as a model for sustainable development across the Global South³. This bilateral relationship creates a gateway to the global level, signaling a shift from bilateral coordination to strategic global climate leadership in the areas of sustainable development and global climate protection.

Recent strategic dialogues have not only focused on emissions and energy but emphasized sustainable development, digital public infrastructure, and climate resilience for vulnerable communities. The EU and India are now moving toward “trilateral cooperation”—joint work for third countries in the Global South—which enhances their influence on sustainable development and global climate governance. This includes joint investments in clean energy, green mobility, sustainable urban planning, agricultural innovation, and digitalization for sustainability. Their practical cooperation ranges from upgrading cold chain logistics to supporting India's metro and urban development with European climate finance. With both parties engaged in international frameworks like the International Solar Alliance and actively shaping post-2020 global biodiversity and sustainable finance roadmaps, the partnership's holistic



Source: https://podcast.srr.ro/RRI2/podcast-uranetplus-green-deal/s_5-c_7701

¹United Nations. (n.d.). Climate reports. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/reports>.

²Press Information Bureau. (n.d.). India is committed to achieve the Net Zero emissions target by 2070 as announced by PM Modi, says Dr. Jitendra Singh. Government of India. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1961797>.

³European External Action Service. (n.d.). The European Union and India to step up their clean energy and climate partnership. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/european-union-and-india-step-their-clean-energy-and-climate-partnership_and_sq

approach models how multilateral, cross-sector engagement can drive large-scale transformation⁴. By scaling up their bilateral achievements to broader platforms, the EU and India are setting a precedent for climate leadership—bridging gaps, sharing expertise, and catalyzing solutions for a net-zero future that is inclusive, resilient, and sustainable for all.

Here, net zero means reducing carbon emissions as much as possible, and absorbing and storing the remaining carbon through the use of nature, such as forests and technology; this way, the total emissions become zero. As the world searches for a credible path to net-zero, the EU-India partnership stands out as a dynamic model for bridging the global North-South divide by integrating ambitious emissions cuts with practical solutions for carbon absorption and storage—such as large-scale afforestation, support for nature-based removal projects, and advancements in carbon capture technologies—while also deepening cooperation through joint research, innovation, and financial mechanisms; in its most recent phase (2025–2028), this collaboration focuses on green hydrogen, renewable power, resource efficiency, and smart urbanization, with both sides sharing progress and technology in offshore wind, solar parks, and energy storage, as well as participating in cross-continental climate dialogues, establishing business-to-business clean energy networks, and reinforcing their commitment to equitable, just, and inclusive transitions critical for global net zero success⁵.

India- EU Net- Zero Related Bilateral Engagement

The second ministerial meeting of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) between the EU and India was held in New Delhi on 28 February 2025, which reflects the growing strategic importance of bilateral climate and technology cooperation plans. Launched in 2022, the TTC provides a structured forum for three working groups. First, the Working Group on Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance, Digital Technologies, Digital Governance and Digital Connectivity. Second, the Working Group on Clean Energy and Green Technologies, which focuses on research, innovation and investment in green technologies, with the aim of promoting renewable and low-carbon fuels such as hydrogen, the circular economy, waste management and tackling marine pollution, as well as recycling batteries for electric vehicles. Third, the Working Group on Trade, Investment and Resilient Value Chains⁶. Under their Clean and Green Technologies, both sides have called for a €60 million joint Horizon Europe research initiative, covering areas such as EV battery recycling, marine plastic pollution and waste-to-hydrogen conversion⁷. TTC convenes an ‘ideathon’ on plastic waste and initiates technical discussions on EV charging man coordination. Beyond bilateral discussions, India-EU strategic climate diplomacy is deepening. India holds bilateral discussions with Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, with a focus on broader climate action and sustainability goals in line with India’s ‘Viksit Bharat 2047’ vision⁸.

The EU has expanded its joint efforts to develop and scale up clean technologies and de-carbonized industries. EU Ambassador Herve Delfin⁹ stressed the need for a “smart economic move” for India and the EU to deploy green hydrogen, battery storage, renewable infrastructure and called for closer cooperation ahead of COP30¹⁰. This engagement reflects a multi-level net-zero partnership, which calls for India and the EU to be key actors in global climate governance.

⁴Ministry of External Affairs. (2024, November 22). 10th meeting of the India–EU Energy Panel and 3rd phase of the Clean Energy and Climate Partnership [Press release]. Government of India. https://www.mea.gov.in/pressreleases.htm?dtl%2F38585%2F10th_Meeting_of_the_IndiaEU_Energy_Panel_and_3rd_Phase_of_the_Clean_Energy_and_Climate_Partnership.

⁵Climate Action Network Europe. (2023). EU-India clean energy and climate partnership: Progress and recommendations (Policy brief, pp. 2–23). <https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2023/07/EU-INDIA-CLIMATE-COOPERATION-BRIEF.pdf>.

⁶European Commission. (n.d.-b). Key outcomes of the second EU-India Trade and Technology Council. Shaping Europe’s Digital Future. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/key-outcomes-second-eu-india-trade-and-technology-council>.

⁷European External Action Service. (n.d.). New EU-India research calls on marine pollution and waste to hydrogen. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/new-eu-india-research-calls-marine-pollution-and-waste-hydrogen_en?s=167.

⁸EURAXESS. (n.d.). IDEATHON: Innovate to combat marine plastic litter. <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/worldwide/india/news/ideathon-innovate-combat-marine-plastic-litter>.

⁹Hervé Delfin is specialised in EU external relations with experience in humanitarian aid, crisis response as well as in EU foreign and security policy, development cooperation and international global issues. He has travelled extensively in Africa and the Middle East. Hervé Delfin has studied Political Science and History as well as European Studies in France, the UK and Belgium (MA at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques and MA at the College of Europe, where he also served as Academic Assistant in the Department of European Political and Administrative Studies). In 2014 he was awarded the title of “Knight of the Legion of Honour”, the highest French National Order.

¹⁰Anand, S. (2025, June 18). World off-track on 1.5°C target, delayed climate action poses huge risk: EU Ambassador. ETenergyworld.com. https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/renewable/eu-ambassador-warns-of-climate-action-delays-as-india-joins-forces-for-clean-tech/121932308?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Shared Responsibilities & Challenges

The EU-India climate partnership stands on a delicate balance of shared challenges and emerging opportunities, highlighting why both countries see climate balance not only as an environmental imperative, but also as a matter of economic competitiveness and geopolitical positioning. India is pursuing a variety of carbon-neutral and diversification strategies. Most notably, India has set a target of reaching net-zero construction by 2070. In recent years, India has increased investment in solar and wind power, and in 2020, India announced a Production Linked Incentive Scheme to set up domestic production of solar modules, batteries and other clean energy equipment. Despite significant progress in renewable energy capacity, particularly solar power, where India has become the world's third-largest market, coal continues to supply more than 70% of its electricity¹¹. At the same time, India is highly vulnerable to climate change, with extreme heat waves, erratic monsoons, and floods that threaten both livelihoods and economic growth¹². India received slightly above-normal rainfall through mid-August 2025, with rainfall between 1st June and 10th August being about 1% above the normal average (539 mm versus 535.6 mm).¹³ Meanwhile, the European Union has committed to climate neutrality by 2050 in its Green. The EU's biggest challenge is to ensure affordable energy supplies and reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and to reduce geopolitical risks in the supply chain of clean technologies¹⁴.

High capital costs, perceived risk, significant funding gaps and regulatory ambiguities remain major obstacles to financing green technologies in India. In addition to addressing poverty and infrastructure needs, the huge investment required to meet India's net-zero target has compounded this problem. With foreign aid declining, developing countries like India are increasingly relying on commercial financing for their industrial transformation efforts. Although the EU is raising substantial funding through Horizon Europe and the Global Gateway¹⁵. Technology transfer and innovation are equally important, with India seeking affordable access to the path to commercialization. The issues India faces are that green hydrogen is fraught with risks, ranging from volatile renewable energy prices and regulatory uncertainty to technical challenges and financial constraints.

Amid these challenges, opportunities have expanded. The EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP), the EU-India Energy and Climate Policy Dialogue, and recent collaborations on EV battery recycling, offshore wind and hydrogen production, and research and development and technology transfer are moving forward¹⁶. The EU is a major investor in India's renewable energy market. The EU has been making major partnerships and investments in India's technology, particularly AI, green energy, space and defense, etc. At the global level, both see the value of projecting joint climate leadership, bridging the global North-South divide, and shaping the energy-governance of the G20, COP30, and the International Solar Alliance¹⁷.

The Way Forward

The partnership between the EU and India finds itself at a crucial moment as global leaders gear up for COP30 in Brazil. What started as bilateral cooperation now needs to become something much bigger—a template that other countries can actually follow¹⁸. The real test isn't just whether these two partners can meet their own climate goals, but whether they can help solve the massive financing puzzle that's been holding back climate action everywhere else. We're talking about bridging a \$1.3 trillion gap in annual climate funding, and that's not happening through traditional aid models. Instead, the EU-India partnership has to get

¹¹International Energy Agency. (2024, October 16). *World energy outlook 2024*. IEA. <https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2024>.

¹²World Bank. (n.d.). *Climate change*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/south-asia-regional-integration/climate-change>

¹³India Meteorological Department. (n.d.). *Home*. <https://mausam.imd.gov.in/>.

¹⁴European Commission. (2025, July 3). *Carbon border adjustment mechanism*. Taxation and Customs Union. https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism_en.

¹⁵European Commission. (2025, July 3). *Carbon border adjustment mechanism*. Taxation and Customs Union. https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism_en.

¹⁶European Commission. (2022). *EU-India connectivity partnership and Global Gateway* [Press release]. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_25_643.

¹⁷International Solar Alliance. (n.d.). *Annual report*. ISA INT. <https://isa.int/annual-report>.

¹⁸COP30 Brazil. (n.d.). *COP30 action agenda calls for accelerating the implementation of the global stocktake*. <https://cop30.br/en/news-about-cop30/cop30-action-agenda-calls-for-accelerating-the-implementation-of-the-global-stocktake>.

creative with how they share technology, finance projects, and build capacity in places that need it most - countries in Africa and Southeast Asia that are watching to see if this whole net-zero thing is actually achievable without sacrificing development¹⁹.

Looking ahead, success will depend on turning good intentions into concrete results that other nations can replicate. India's early achievement of 50% non-fossil fuel capacity shows what's possible when policy meets practical action, while the EU's 2040 targets demonstrate serious long-term commitment²⁰. But the real measure of this partnership won't be found in bilateral trade statistics or diplomatic communiques. It will show up in whether farmers in Bangladesh can access climate-resilient seeds, whether manufacturers in Nigeria can afford clean energy technology, and whether small island states can protect themselves from rising seas using innovations developed through EU-India collaboration. The partnership has built solid foundations through their Trade and Technology Council and expanded clean energy programs—now they need to prove these models work beyond their own borders.

¹⁹Forum on Trade, Environment & the SDGs. (n.d.). *Addressing the climate technology gap in developing countries through effective technology transfer*. TESS. <https://tessforum.org/latest/addressing-the-climate-technology-gap-in-developing-countries-through-effective-technology-transfer>.

²⁰Reuters. (2025, July 14). *India hits 50% non-fossil power milestone ahead of 2030 clean energy target*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/india-hits-50-non-fossil-power-milestone-ahead-2030-clean-energy-target-2025-07-14>.

INDIA



Marching Towards Indigenisation: India's Defence Export Potential

Gargi AWASHTI (India)

Since 2014, defence production and strengthening the industrial base have remained key agenda items for the national security policy of the Modi government. Defence exports have increased from INR¹ 686 crores in 2013–2014 to INR 23,622 crores in 2024–2025.

The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative was launched in 2020—during the Modi government's second tenure—and became a significant step against the backdrop of the stand-off between the Indian Army (IA) and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) along the India-China border. The crisis catalysed the need for defence preparedness and self-reliance in production, offering a new boost to India's Defence Industrial Base (DIB). The government's emphasis on domestic production and procurement through indigenous sources helped both private companies and Defence Public Sector Units (DPSUs) to expand capacities and deliver export orders.



Source: <https://stiri.md/article/afaceri/ambasada-indiei-india-consolideaza-productia-in-industria-de-aparare/>

As part of broader defence sector reforms, the government introduced the Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) 2020 alongside the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, aiming to strengthen the ecosystem for defence exports. The exponential growth in defence exports can be attributed to four key factors: indigenisation of the defence sector with the participation of private industry and five indigenisation lists; corporatisation of Ordnance Factories Board (OFBs) and continuous political direction and guidance to oversee self-reliance in the defence sector.

More Competitive than DPSUs

In terms of exports, India has diversified its defence-related consumer base. Among major DPSUs—Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) alone exports to 51 countries. In addition to conventional subsystems and components, India's DPSUs are advancing with the export of major systems, including Dornier-228 aircraft, BrahMos missiles, Aakash SAM missiles, and Pinaka rocket launchers. In the private sector, major

¹Indian Rupee - The Indian rupee (currency sign: ₹; code: INR) is the official currency of India. The symbol for the Indian rupee is “₹” derived from the consonant “र” (ra) in the Indian Devanagari script and the Latin capital letter “R” (without the vertical line). The parallel lines at the top of the symbol (with a space between them) allude to the Indian tricolour. The first series of coins with the new symbol were put into circulation on 8 July 2011.

stakeholders such as Kalyani Strategic Systems Limited (KSSL) exported 100 artillery guns in 2024—including 18 Advanced Towed Artillery Guns (ATAGs)—to several countries, including European countries. In February 2025, KSSL also signed a letter of intent with the United States (US) AM General for the supply of artillery cannons. Bharat Forge, a leading Indian private defence firm, announced in its Annual Report 2024 that it secured revenue of INR 1,561 crore², with 90 percent derived from defence exports. Within the last decade, especially since the Atmanirbharta Mission in 2020, the private sector has created great potential to expand India's defence export base in the future.

A Robust DIB for Defence Exports

New Delhi has set an ambitious target of defence exports worth INR 50,000 crores by 2029. India's existing track record and success story in defence exports must be established through a competitive and organic defence industrial base in the long term. The existing DIB should be made resilient and adaptive to cater to three major changes: the geopolitical environment, technological innovation, and the changing character of warfare.

A resilient mechanism for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) processes is required to secure innovations for scaling and export purposes.

The DPSUs demand a clear roadmap for the indigenisation of components, capabilities, and policy processes. The 2022–2023 Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence highlights a set of challenges for DPSUs, including untapped capacity, delayed delivery timelines, delayed or pending permissions for the export of missile systems from foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM), and delayed clearance from stakeholders in turnkey projects. The indigenisation cells within these DPSUs need acceleration to implement processes at each unit. Additionally, a resilient mechanism for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) processes is required to secure innovations for scaling and export purposes.

In conclusion, both the private sector defence companies and DPSUs must maintain momentum and evolve amidst structural cum organisational limitations. Although DPSUs have an edge over the private sector in domestic defence production, they lag in defence exports vis-à-vis the private sector. The differences in export performance and trends illustrate why the private sector outperforms DPSUs in achieving India's ambitious defence export goals.

Rise in India's Defence Production

India has achieved the highest-ever growth in indigenous defence production in value terms during Financial Year (FY) 2023–2024, driven by the successful implementation of government policies and initiatives led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, focusing on attaining Atmanirbharta³.

According to data from all Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs), other public sector units manufacturing defence items, and private companies, the value of defence production has surged to a record high of ₹1,27,265 crore, representing an impressive increase of approximately 174% from ₹46,429 crore in 2014–2015. Historically, India relied heavily on foreign countries for its defence needs, with about 65–70% of defence equipment being imported. However, this landscape has dramatically shifted, with around 65% of defence equipment now manufactured within India. This transformation reflects the country's commitment to self-reliance in this critical sector and underscores the strength of its defence industrial base, which comprises 16 Defence Public Sector Units (DPSUs), over 430 licensed companies, and approximately 16,000 Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Notably, 21% of this production comes from the private sector, bolstering India's journey toward self-reliance.

²Crore (abbreviated cr) denotes the quantity ten million (10⁷) and is equal to 100 lakh in the Indian numbering system. In many international contexts, the decimal quantity is formatted as 10,000,000, but when used in the context of the Indian numbering system, the quantity is usually formatted 1,00,00,000. Crore is widely used both in official and other contexts in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. Large amounts of money in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan are often written in terms of crore. For example 150,000,000 (one hundred and fifty million) rupees is written as "fifteen crore rupees", ("₹ 15 crore"). In the abbreviated form, usage such as "₹ 15 cr" is common.

³Atmanirbhar Bharat (translated as "Self-Reliance India") is a phrase associated with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party-led administration to promote economic self-reliance and national development during the pandemic. The term serves as an umbrella concept encompassing the government's vision of making India more efficient, competitive, and resilient, while expanding its role in the global economy by transforming India into a "global supply chain hub". Although Modi has referred to the English term "self-reliance" since 2014 in discussions on national security, poverty reduction, and the Digital India initiative, the Hindi phrase Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-Reliance India Mission) gained prominence during the announcement of India's economic stimulus package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

As part of the Make in India initiative, major defence platforms such as the Dhanush Artillery Gun System, Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS), Main Battle Tank (MBT) Arjun, Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, submarines, frigates, corvettes, and the recently commissioned INS Vikrant have been developed, reflecting the growing capabilities of India's defence sector.

Consequently, the annual defence production has not only crossed ₹1.27 lakh crore but is also on track to reach a target of ₹1.75 lakh crore in the current fiscal year. With aspirations to achieve ₹3 lakh crore in defence production by 2029, India is solidifying its position as a global manufacturing hub for defence.

India's Defence Exports Surge

ImageIndia's defence exports have reached an all-time high, surging from ₹686 crore in FY 2013-2014 to ₹21,083 crore in FY 2023-2024, reflecting a remarkable increase of over 30 times in export value over the past decade.

This achievement is driven by effective policy reforms, initiatives, and improvements in the ease of doing business implemented by the government, all aimed at attaining self-reliance in defence. Notably, defence exports also experienced a substantial growth of 32.5% over the previous fiscal year, rising from ₹15,920 crore.

India's export portfolio boasts a diverse range of advanced defence equipment, including bulletproof jackets and helmets, Dornier (Do-228) aircraft, Chetak helicopters, fast interceptor boats, and lightweight torpedoes. A noteworthy highlight is the inclusion of 'Made in Bihar' boots in the Russian Army's equipment, marking a significant milestone for Indian products in the global defence market and showcasing the country's high manufacturing standards.

Currently, India exports to over 100 nations, with the top three destinations for defence exports in 2023-24 being the USA, France, and Armenia. According to Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh⁴, the target is to further increase defence exports to ₹50,000 crore by 2029. This expanding international footprint underscores India's commitment to becoming a reliable defence partner globally while bolstering its economic growth through enhanced defence production and exports.

Key Government Initiatives

In recent years, the Indian government has implemented a series of transformative initiatives aimed at bolstering the country's defence production capabilities and achieving self-reliance. These measures are designed to attract investment, enhance domestic manufacturing, and streamline procurement processes. From liberalizing foreign direct investment (FDI) limits to prioritizing indigenous production, these initiatives reflect a robust commitment to strengthening India's defence industrial base. The following points outline the key government initiatives that have been pivotal in driving growth and innovation in the defence sector.

Liberalized FDI Policy: The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) limit in the defence sector was raised in 2020 to 74% through the Automatic Route for companies seeking new defence industrial licenses and up to 100% through the Government Route for those likely to result in access to modern technology. As of February 9, 2024, ₹5,077 crore worth of FDI has been reported by companies operating in the defence sector.

Budget Allocation: The allocation for the Ministry of Defence for the financial year 2024-25 is ₹ 6, 21,940.85 crore, as part of the "Demand for Grant" presented in Parliament during the ongoing Budget Session.

Priority for Domestic Procurement: Emphasis is placed on procuring capital items from domestic sources under the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP)-2020.

Positive Indigenization Lists: Notification of five 'Positive Indigenization Lists' totalling 509 items of services and five lists of 5,012 items from Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs), with an embargo on imports beyond specified timelines.

⁴Rajnath Singh (born 10 July 1951) is an Indian politician and lecturer who has been serving as the 29th Union Minister of Defence, since 2019, and as the Deputy Leader of the House, Lok Sabha, since 2014. He previously served as the 25th Union Minister of Home Affairs in the first Modi ministry, from 2014 to 2019, making him the first person born after Indian independence to hold the office. He was the President of the Bharatiya Janata Party, from 2005 to 2009 and from 2013 to 2014. Singh is a veteran leader of the BJP who started his career as a swayamsevak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Singh previously served as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, from 2000 to 2002, and a Cabinet Minister for Road Transport and Highways in the Vajpayee Government, from 1999 to 2000, and the minister of Agriculture, from 2003 to 2004. He was the President of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, from 1988 to 1990. He was a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly from Haidargarh constituency twice, and held the office of chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. He was a member of Lok Sabha from Lucknow, since 2014, and Ghaziabad, from 2009 to 2014. He was also a member of Rajya Sabha, from 2002 to 2008 and from 1994 to 2001.

Simplified Licensing Process: Streamlining the industrial licensing process with a longer validity period.

iDEX Scheme Launch: The Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme was launched to involve startups and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in defence innovation.

Public Procurement Preference: Implementation of the Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) Order 2017 to support domestic manufacturers.

Indigenization Portal: Launch of the Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action (SRIJAN) portal to facilitate indigenization by Indian industry, including MSMEs.

Defence Industrial Corridors: Establishment of two Defence Industrial Corridors, one each in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, to promote defence manufacturing.

Opening Defence R&D: Defence Research & Development (R&D) has been opened up for industry and startups to foster innovation and collaboration.

Domestic Procurement Allocation: Out of the total allocation of ₹1,40,691.24 crore under the Capital Acquisition (Modernization) Segment, ₹1,05,518.43 crore (75%) has been earmarked for domestic procurement in the Budget Estimates for 2024-2025.

India's journey toward *Atmanirbharta* in defence reflects a transformative shift from reliance on imports to becoming a self-sufficient manufacturing hub. The record achievements in domestic production and exports underscore the government's commitment to enhancing national security and bolstering economic growth through robust defence initiatives. With strategic policies in place, a growing emphasis on indigenization, and a vibrant defence industrial base, India is poised to not only meet its own security needs but also emerge as a key player in the global arms market. The ambitious targets set for future production and exports signify a strong resolve to reinforce the country's position as a reliable defence partner worldwide. As India continues to innovate and collaborate across sectors, it is well on its way to solidifying its status as a formidable force in global defence manufacturing.

WESTERN BALKANS



The Strategic Imperative of Integrating the Western Balkans into the European Union

Eduard VASILJ (Croatia)

1. Europe's Geopolitical Front Yard

The Western Balkans, comprising Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, is home to approximately 18 million people. Geographically, it lies at a historic crossroads between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. For centuries, this region has been the scene of shifting empires, trade routes, and conflict. Today, it serves as a vital strategic buffer zone along the EU's southeastern flank. Its mountains, rivers, ports, and road networks form natural corridors and chokepoints, linking Central Europe to the Aegean, the Black Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Integration of the Western Balkans is not simply an act of goodwill or economic expansion; it is a matter of securing Europe's immediate neighbourhood. Every delay creates a vacuum that external powers are quick to fill, shaping political alliances and infrastructure projects in ways that may not align with EU security or economic interests.

2. A Geopolitical Contest: EU vs. Russia, China, and Turkey

The EU's slow-moving, bureaucratic enlargement process has allowed rival powers to entrench themselves. Russia maintains strong political, cultural, and religious ties to parts of the region, especially Serbia and the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It uses energy dependency, disinformation, and political support for separatists to obstruct Euro-Atlantic integration. China has made deep inroads through the Belt and Road Initiative, financing infrastructure, energy, and transport projects, often under opaque terms that create long-term debt dependencies. Furthermore, China holds a significant advantage in securing natural resources. Turkey leverages its Ottoman heritage, combining cultural diplomacy with investment in construction, finance, and media to bolster its influence among Muslim communities.

These actors are not only present; they actively seek to reshape governance models, trade patterns, and security alignments in ways that challenge EU influence.

Russia controls Serbia's energy sector through the company NIS (Naftna industrija Srbije). In Bosnia



Source: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2024/12/30/eu-and-the-western-balkans-in-2025-five-things-to-watch-in-the-year-of-crossroads/>

and Herzegovina, the only two refineries belong to the Russian corporation Zarubezhneft. In 2022, China invested approximately 1.4 billion EUR in Serbia – roughly equivalent to the total investment volume of all 27 EU member states combined. In the first half of 2024, it became the largest foreign investor with 697.9 million EUR, and additionally signed a memorandum of understanding for a further 2 billion EUR to be invested in renewable energy. Turkey controls the container and general cargo terminal at the Port of Bar (Montenegro) through the company Global Ports Holding Plc. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkish Airlines holds a 49% stake in BH Airlines, and the Ziraat Bank is an important financial player in the country. Turkey financed EUR 100 million for sections of the Sarajevo-Belgrade motorway – a geopolitical symbol of connectivity. In the course of intensified cultural diplomacy, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) alone invested over 30 million EUR in the restoration of historical sites and mosques between 2017 and 2023. Turkey is also expanding its strategic presence in Albania through the construction sector; the housing company TOKI has built thousands of earthquake-proof residential units. The Et'hem Bey Mosque in Tirana was renovated under Turkish supervision.

3. Europe's Structural Weakness

The EU enters this contest at a disadvantage:

It is primarily a values-based community, promoting democracy, rule of law, and human rights – a strength in legitimacy, but a weakness in rapid geopolitical manoeuvring. It is not a unified geopolitical actor; there is no single economic foreign policy, leaving room for bilateral deals with outside powers, and the EU has no standing military, relying instead on NATO (a security guarantee increasingly uncertain given the transatlantic political dynamic).

Consensus decision-making allows individual member states to block or delay enlargement, undermining EU credibility. This makes the EU slower and less decisive than its rivals.

In contrast, Russia, China, and Turkey can deploy economic, political, and security tools far more swiftly, often without the constraints of democratic consensus.

4. Economic Significance of the Western Balkans

Despite modest current GDP compared to the EU core, the Western Balkans holds notable economic and strategic assets:

Serbia is a regional agricultural powerhouse, exporting wheat, maize, fruits, and wine worth over 5 billion EUR annually. It also has potential lithium deposits in the Jadar Valley, significant copper deposits, and vast coal reserves, including approximately 5.5 billion tonnes of lignite, similar to Kosovo. Bosnia and Herzegovina holds rich bauxite and iron ore resources, while North Macedonia produces chromium and nickel. Albania produces nearly all its electricity from hydropower and holds Europe's largest onshore oil field at Patos-Marinëz.

In terms of infrastructure and logistics, the ports of Montenegro and Albania's Adriatic coastline provide critical maritime access and transit routes. Montenegro's port of Bar is a key Adriatic gateway, and Albania's ports, such as Durrës and Vlorë, provide critical access points for trade and NATO logistics.

These resources, if integrated into the EU framework, could boost European resilience in agriculture, energy, raw materials, and logistics.

5. Military Capacity and Security Risks

The Western Balkans lacks unified military structures; only Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are NATO members. Serbia maintains a relatively capable armed force but is militarily aligned with neither NATO nor the EU. However, integration cannot proceed blindly.

Serbia under President Vučić continues to destabilise the region by fuelling tensions in Kosovo, backing secessionist rhetoric in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and influencing politics in Montenegro. Vučić's close ties to Moscow and Beijing raise the risk of sensitive EU or NATO information being shared with these powers. Montenegro faces significant infiltration risks from pro-Serbian and pro-Russian political actors, which could potentially compromise NATO intelligence. Similar threats may also arise from Chinese actors. Russian hybrid warfare (from cyberattacks to disinformation) has already targeted Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina to weaken their Euro-Atlantic trajectory.

Without addressing these vulnerabilities, enlargement could import instability into the EU rather than neutralising it.

6. Geostrategic Importance

The Western Balkans is more than just Europe's backyard; it is a gateway and shield. The region links Central Europe to the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Asia. Its transit routes, ports, energy pipelines, and digital infrastructure are critical for trade, energy security, and military mobility. Control of these routes determines Europe's ability to respond to crises, secure supply lines, and maintain influence in its southern neighbourhood.

7. Conclusion: Conditional, Strategic and Urgent Integration

The Western Balkans offers demographic potential, critical raw materials, fertile land, and a pivotal geographic position. Integrating the region would close one of Europe's most significant security gaps, diminish the reach of rival powers, and align the EU's south-eastern flank under a unified framework. Its integration would close a vulnerability in Europe's security architecture, reduce the influence of Russia, China, and Turkey, and strengthen the EU's role in its neighbourhood.

However, integration must be conditional. Rule-of-law reforms, anti-corruption measures, and alignment with EU foreign and security policy are prerequisites. Strategic patience is essential – but so is urgency. In the Balkans, geopolitical vacuums are never empty for long. They are swiftly filled by powers with interests that may run counter to European stability and values.

In this context, hesitation is not neutrality – it is the gradual surrender of influence to those who seek to reshape Europe's borders and political order.

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - CYBERSECURITY

Understanding National Security Part VIII: The Component of Cybersecurity

PhD (c) Georgios KOUKAKIS (Greece)

Cybersecurity matters because most organisations in the UK rely on digital technology to function. It ensures the UK's critical national infrastructure continue to operate in our increasingly connected world, and that governments can provide essential services. [...] Cyber security should therefore be a key part of every organisation's operational resilience. [...] Cyber security can prevent criminals from accessing our accounts and services, and helps us to navigate our online lives, safely and with confidence.

National Cyber Security Centre (UK)

Abstract

This article is the eighth part of an article series that aim to present the various components of *national security*, a dimension of security that has recently been under the spotlight due to the numerous crises that have emerged and the plethora of threats that prevail in the contemporary security environment. It focuses on cybersecurity, a component of national security that is interconnected with a significant number of policy fields, therefore affects the proper functioning of a state and the well-being of its citizens. Its purpose is to explain the content of this component, present its interconnection with other components of national security, analyse its impact to various policy fields, and finally highlight its importance for peace and stability. The main conclusion of the article is that cybersecurity is an important component of national security and must not be overlooked.

Introduction

The contemporary security environment has been characterised as an environment of *polycrises* (multiple crises) and *permacrises* (permanent crises)¹, due to the numerous long-lasting and different types (military, economic, energy, food, health, etc.) of crises that have occurred. In this context, national security is of vital importance for every state, as it contributes greatly to the promotion of its national interests and the wellbeing of its citizens, since security and development are interconnected². One of the components of national security is *cybersecurity*, the importance of which has been highlighted in the past decades, as it affects several policy fields.

¹Koukakis, G. (2023). *Permacrises and Polycrises: Outlining the Contemporary Security Environment through References to Strategic Documents of Regional and International Actors*. HAPSc Policy Briefs Series, Vol 4 (2). 55-64. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.36661>.

²Stern, M., & Öjendal, J. (2010). *Mapping the Security-Development Nexus: Conflict, Complexity, Cacophony, Convergence? Security Dialogue*, 41(1), 5-29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26301183>.

The article presents the content of cybersecurity, a significant component of national security. Its importance lies in the fact that countering cyber threats is very important for every state, as it ensures the states' *proper function* and the well-being of its citizens. Moreover, the large number of recent cyber-attacks has led states to re-evaluate their policy regarding cybersecurity in order to enhance their cyber-resilience and overall national security. Thus, the article complements the existing literature as it provides additional information that can help *citizens* understand the need for enhancing cybersecurity and *policy makers* plan respective policies in a more effective way.

Its purpose is to explain the content of cybersecurity, present its interconnection with other components of national security and policy fields, and highlight its importance for peace and stability. The main conclusion is that cybersecurity is an important component of national security and must not be overlooked, as this will have major consequences on a large number of policy fields. As far as the structure of the article is concerned, it initially clarifies the concept of security and defines cybersecurity in the context of national security. After that it presents the main international collaborative schemes and recent incidents regarding cybersecurity, then proceeds to a brief analysis of the interconnection between cybersecurity and other policy fields, and concludes by referring to future challenges and opportunities as far as cybersecurity is concerned.

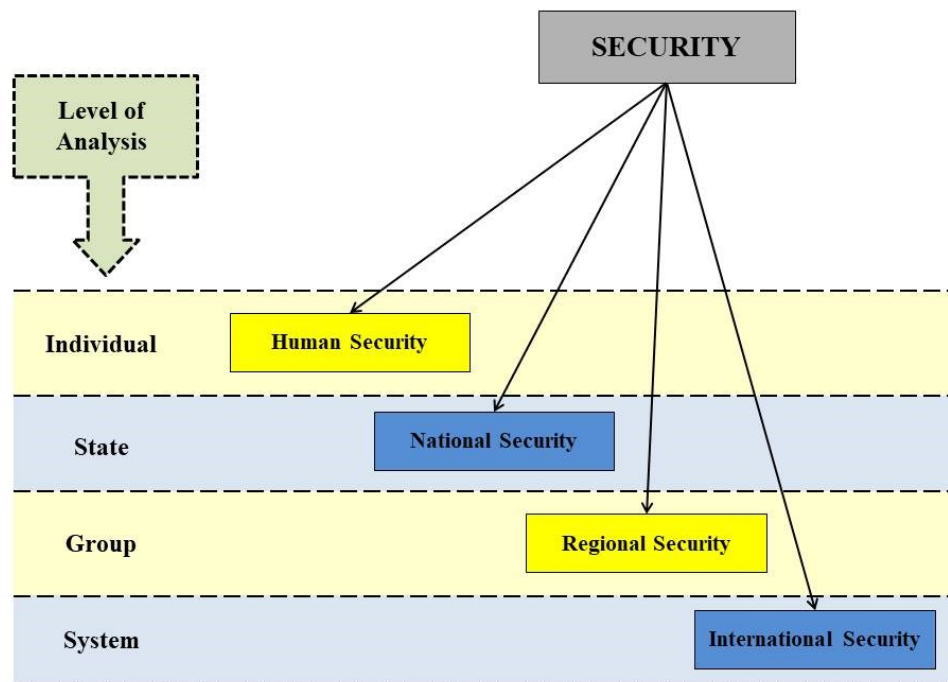


Figure 1: The 4 types of security
Source: Created by Georgios Koukakis

The Concept of Security

The term *security* originates from the Latin word *securitas/securus* whose first compound is the word *sine* meaning *without* and the second compound the word *cura* meaning *fear, worry, anxiety*, etc³. Thus, security is the state in which fear, worry, and anxiety are absent, due to the necessary actions taken by an actor (individual, group, state, organization, etc.) in order to be protected against threats and/or risks. Therefore, security can be categorized according to the level of analysis into *four types*; *Human Security* at the individual level, *National Security* at the state level, *Regional Security* at the group level, and *International Security* at the system level (**Figure 1**).

³Neocleous, M. (2000). *Against security*. *Radical Philosophy*, 100, 7-15. <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/against-security>.

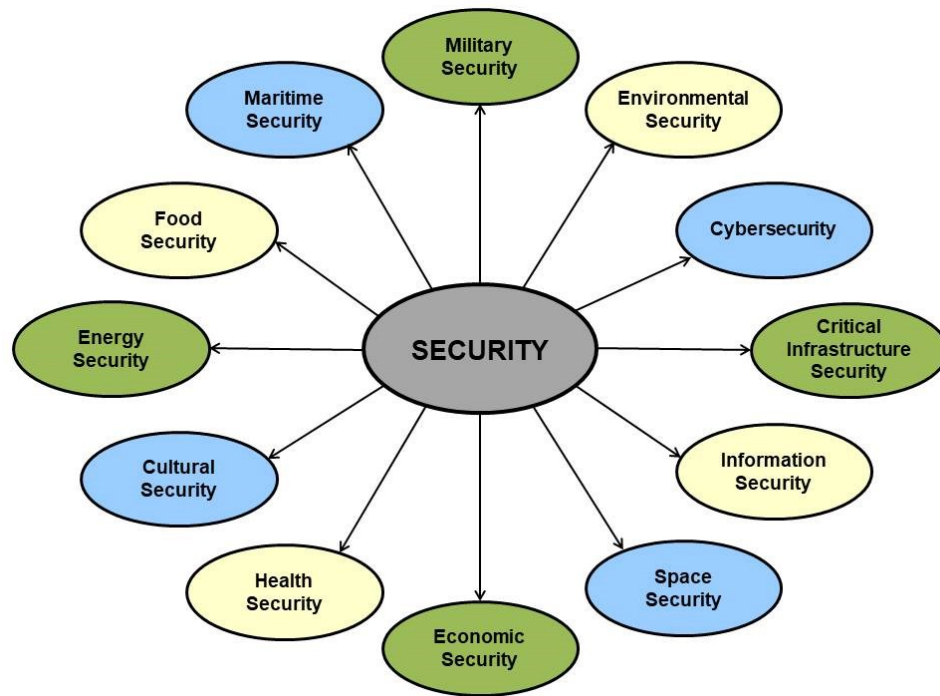


Figure 2: Indicative dimensions/components of security

Source: Created by Georgios Koukakis

At first, security was mainly related to *national security* (the protection of the state), a concept that was introduced by the United States of America (USA) through the *National Security Act* signed in 1947⁴. This new paradigm focused on the internal structure of each state, reflecting its interaction with the security environment, a relation that is based on the state's perception of insecurity⁵. Later on, the United Nations (UN) related security to people and the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment⁶, introducing the concept of *human security* through the *Human Development Report* that was published in 1994⁷. As far as *regional security* is concerned, despite the fact that it (etymologically) comprises the national security of the states of a specific region, it also expresses the strong relations developed among them due to their similar cultural, political and legal systems⁸. Therefore, it enables them to act collectively against common threats and cooperate in several fields in order to facilitate development –as security and development are two closely related terms⁹– leading to the establishment of several regional organisations such as the EU¹⁰.

Finally, *international security* is closely related to globalization¹¹, mostly dealing with global threats through international organizations such as the United Nations¹². Moreover, security – regardless the institutional

⁴Department of State. (n.d.). *National Security Act of 1947* [Official Document]. [https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act#:~:text=The%20National%20Security%20Act%20of,National%20Security%20Council%20\(NSC\)](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act#:~:text=The%20National%20Security%20Act%20of,National%20Security%20Council%20(NSC)).

⁵Buzan, B. (1983). *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. Wheatsheaf Books, 69.

⁶Buzan, B. & Hansen, L. (2009). *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. Cambridge University Press, 203.

⁷United Nations Development Programme. (1994). *Human Development Report 1994*. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr1994encompletenostatpdf.pdf>.

⁸Graham, K. & Felicio, T. (2005). *Regional Security and Global Governance: A Proposal for a 'Regional-Global Security Mechanism' in Light of the UN High-Level Panel's Report*, Egmont Paper, 4. <http://aei.pitt.edu/8985/>.

⁹Krause, K. & Jütersonke, O. (2005). *Peace, Security and Development*, *Security Dialogue*, 36(4), 447-462. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0967010605060449>.

¹⁰Bailes, A. & Cottey, A. (2006). *Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century*, in Bailes, A. (ed.) *SIPRI Yearbook 2006: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Oxford University Press, 195–223.

¹¹Cha, V. (2000). *Globalization and the Study of International Security*, *Journal of Peace Research*, 37(3), 391-403. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022343300037003007>.

¹²United Nations. (2023). *Determined: Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization* [Official Document]. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_annual_report_2023_en_0.pdf.

level at which it is examined— encompasses several *dimensions/components*, depending on the specific policy field that is endangered and/or the origin of threats/risks (**Figure 2**). These include but are not limited to, the following components: military security, economic security, energy security, critical infrastructure security, environmental security, food security, health security, maritime security, space security, cybersecurity, cultural security, water security, demographic security, and information security.

The Content of Cybersecurity

Taking into consideration the aforementioned definition of security, it is understood that cybersecurity – as a component of national security – is the protection of a state’s *infrastructure, citizens, data*, and overall *functioning* from any threat/risk that is related to cyberspace. To be more precise, the European Union defines cybersecurity as “[...] *the practice of protecting computers, servers, networks, data and systems from malicious attacks, unauthorised access and damage*”¹³, while the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) refers that:

*“Its core function is to defend the digital services and devices we rely on from online threats, which includes safeguarding the vast amounts of data and personal information stored locally or in the cloud. Cyber security also ensures that innovative and emerging technologies (such as AI) can be deployed in a secure way, so the opportunities they present can be fully realised”*¹⁴.

Cybersecurity must also be distinguished from *cyber defence*, because these two terms are similar, yet different. According the House of Commons Defence Committee of the United Kingdom:

*“[...] the notion of cyber security is generic and encompasses all protection activities. However, cyber defence seems to be a much more specialised activity linked to particular themes and organisations. The distinguishing factors in what should make security different from defence in the networked, cyber, environment should be the nature of the threat, the assets that need to be protected and the protection mechanisms applied”*¹⁵.

In order though for the content of cybersecurity to be fully comprehended, the following cybersecurity factors need to be analysed.

1. Threats/Risks: As far as cybersecurity threats are concerned, it must be stressed that they include both *state actors* (e.g. hostile states’ cyber agencies) and *non-state actors* (e.g. independent hackers or criminal organizations). According to the latest *Threat Landscape Report* of ENISA¹⁶, the prime cybersecurity threats are: (i) ransomware, (ii) malware, (iii) social engineering, (iv) threats against data, (v) threats against availability: denial of service, (vi) information manipulation and interference, and (vii) supply chain attacks (**Figure 3**).

¹³European Council. (2025, July 07). Cybersecurity. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/topics/cybersecurity/>

¹⁴NCSC. (n.d.). What is cyber security?. <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/about-ncsc/what-is-cyber-security>

¹⁵House of Commons Defence Committee. 2012). Defence and Cyber-Security (Sixth Report of Session 2012–13), 23. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmdfence/106/106vw.pdf>

¹⁶ENISA. (2024). ENISA Threat Landscape 2024. https://www.enisa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/ENISA%20Threat%20Landscape%202024_0.pdf

ENISA Threat Landscape 2024



Figure 3: Prime cybersecurity threats

Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7242512364510564352/>

2. **Means:** As far as the means that an actor may use to (intentionally) threaten a state's cybersecurity, they usually include *physical means* (e.g. explosives, weapons, tools, etc. to destroy, prohibit the use (denial of service), or temporarily disrupt the functioning of infrastructure related to cyberspace), *cyber means* (e.g. the employment of a virus to disrupt the functioning of a digital service), or *administrative/operational means* (e.g. restrictive measures that prohibit the use of cyber space). Moreover, a state's cybersecurity can be threatened unintentionally by a *technical deficiency* (malfunction) or an accident.

3. **Ways:** As far as the ways that the aforementioned means are used, the most common ones include (public and/or covert) *cyber activities* (e.g. cyber-attacks) and/or *physical activities* (e.g. sabotage) against a state's cyber infrastructure/services.

4. **Goals/Objectives:** The main goal that an actor aspires to accomplish by prohibiting or disrupting the functioning of a state's digital services and cause damage to its related infrastructure/assets is to impose its will by *coercion*. As far as the objectives are concerned, they usually include the *deprivation* of its cyber resources in order to cause malfunction in several policy fields, cause public unrest to put pressure on the state's leadership or undermine the public's trust to democratic governance in order to promote authoritative parties.

5. **Strategic documents:** Concerning the strategic documents related to cybersecurity, they usually include either official *specialised documents* –such as the *National Cybersecurity Strategy* of the United States¹⁷, Hellenic Republic (Greece)¹⁸, Canada¹⁹, Italy²⁰, and Ireland²¹, and the *Government Cyber Security*

¹⁷The White House. (2023). *National Cybersecurity Strategy*. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/National-Cybersecurity-Strategy-2023.pdf>.

¹⁸Ministry of Digital Governance of the Hellenic Republic. (2020). *National Cybersecurity Strategy 2020-2025*, 14. https://www.mindigital.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/E%CE%9D-NATIONAL-CYBER-SECURITY-STRATEGY-2020_2025.pdf.

¹⁹Ministry of Public Safety of Canada. (2025). *Canada's National Cyber Security Strategy*. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/ntnl-cbr-scrst-strtg-2025/ntnl-cbr-scrst-strtg-2025-en.pdf>.

²⁰National Cybersecurity Agency of Italy. (2025). *National Cybersecurity Strategy 2022-2026*. <https://www.acn.gov.it/portale/en/strategia-nazionale-di-cybersicurezza>.

²¹Government of Ireland. (2025). *National Cyber Security Strategy 2019-2024*. https://www.ncsc.gov.ie/pdfs/National_Cyber_Security_Strategy.pdf.

Strategy of the United Kingdom— or grand strategy documents such as the *National Security Strategy* (NSS) of the United States, the *National Strategic Review* (NSR) of France, and the *Concept of the Foreign Policy* of the Russian Federation, that include special chapters/sections regarding cybersecurity. Their main purpose is to provide the framework – by assessing the conditions (threats, risks, challenges and opportunities) of the cybersecurity environment, defining the desired ends (goals), necessary means, and preferable ways of using them – in which the related departments of the public sector will implement their respective strategies (**Figure 4**).

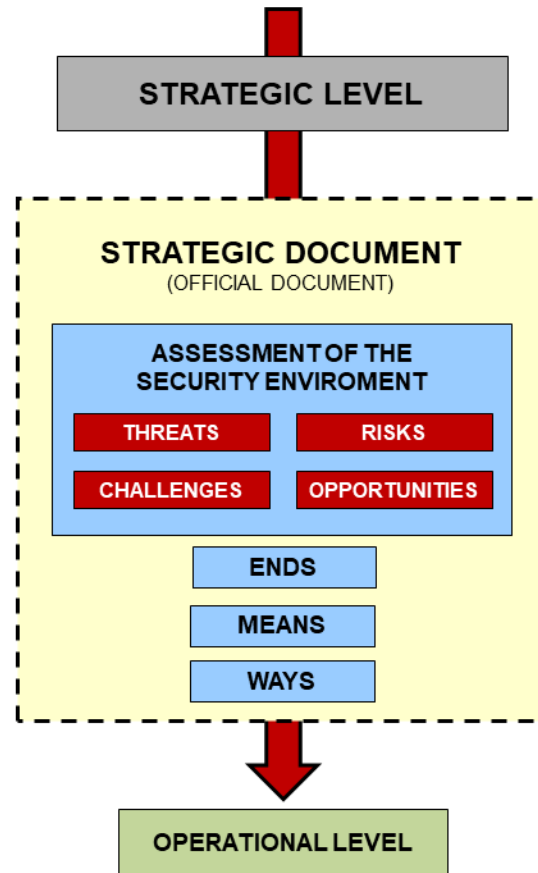


Figure 4: The function of Strategic Documents
Source: Created by Georgios Koukakis

6. Decision-making: As far as the decision making process related to cybersecurity is concerned, due to the fact that it is a quite important policy field that must be coordinated with other actors, the decision for the implementation of a certain cybersecurity policy is usually taken in the higher strategic political level (Head of State/Government) by the respective *Ministry of the Digital Governance* or a *National Cybersecurity Agency*. It must also be noted that –due to their interconnection with a variety of policy fields– cybersecurity issues are usually addressed jointly with other relative issues.

Some of the most basic terms related to cybersecurity that provide useful insight to and facilitate the comprehension of its content are the following:

1. Malware (Malicious Software): Any software or firmware²⁶ intended to perform an unauthorised process that will have an adverse impact on the confidentiality, integrity or availability of a system²⁷.

²⁶Firmware, also known as “software for hardware,” is program code embedded in hardware devices that enables them and their features to function properly. For further details visit: Flinders, M. & Smalley, I. (2024, September 11). What is firmware? IBM. <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/firmware>.

²⁷ENISA. (2024). ENISA Threat Landscape 2024, 7. https://www.enisa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/ENISA%20Threat%20Landscape%202024_0.pdf.

2. Ransomware: A type of attack where threat actors take control of a target's assets and demand a ransom in exchange for the return of the asset's availability or in exchange for publicly exposing the target's data.²⁸

3. Social Engineering: A broad range of activities that attempt to exploit human error or human behaviour with the objective of gaining access to information or services.²⁹

4. Threats against data: Any breach of security leading to the accidental or unlawful destruction, loss, alteration or unauthorised disclosure of or access to personal data transmitted, stored or otherwise processed.³⁰

5. Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS): A type of attack where users of a system or service are not able to access relevant data, services or other resources.³¹

6. Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI): A mostly non-illegal pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures and political processes. Such activity is manipulative in character, conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner.³²

7. Phishing: Malicious e-mails or telephone conversations which intend to mislead users and reveal confidential information.³³

8. Botnets: Networks that consist of malicious computer devices infected with malware and are centrally controlled by an attacker to be used as a group to send spam, denial of service attacks, crypto jacking, etc.³⁴

9. Crypto jacking: Techniques that use the computing power of the user's computer to extract (mining) cryptocurrencies (bitcoins).³⁵

10. Cybercrime: A wide range of offenses that falls into two broad categories: *cyber-enabled* and *cyber-dependent*. Cyber-enabled crimes include traditional criminal activities conducted online, such as trafficking, fraud, and incitement to violence and hate. Cyber-dependent crimes are those committed through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) devices, including phishing, identity theft, and the deployment of malware and ransomware.³⁶

International Collaboration

Most states –acknowledging that their common national goals/objectives in several policy fields can be achieved in a more quick and efficient way (also minimizing cost) through cooperation – have been collaborating on cybersecurity issues either on bilateral (state-to-state) or multilateral (in the framework of their participation in a regional/international organization) level. It must also be noted that the importance of cyberspace for development was also recognised by the United Nations in 2015 through the publication of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, as its 9th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) sets inter alia as an objective to:

“Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020”³⁷.

One of the most important initiatives taken concerning cybersecurity in international level was the *Paris*

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*

³³ Ministry of Digital Governance of the Hellenic Republic. (2020). *Ibid*, 14.

³⁴ *Ibid*¹⁵

³⁵ Ministry of Digital Governance of the Hellenic Republic. (2020). *Ibid*, 14.

³⁶ United Nations. (n.d.). *Basic facts about the global cybercrime treaty*. <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/basic-facts-about-global-cybercrime-treaty>.

³⁷ United Nations. (n.d.). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace (**Figure 5**) which was sent by the President of the French Republic (Emmanuel Macron) in 2018 during the *Paris Peace Forum* and the *Internet Governance Forum* of UNESCO.³⁸



Figure 5: Logos of the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace

Source: <https://pariscall.international/en/>

The Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace –which is supported so far by 81 states, 36 public authorities & local governments, 390 organizations, and 706 companies & private sector entities³⁹– suggested the endorsement of nine principles regarding cybersecurity⁴⁰, as follows:

1. **Protect individuals and infrastructure:** Prevent and recover from malicious cyber activities that threaten or cause significant, indiscriminate or systemic harm to individuals and critical infrastructure.
2. **Protect the Internet:** Prevent activity that intentionally and substantially damages the general availability or integrity of the public core of the Internet.
3. **Defend electoral processes:** Strengthen our capacity to prevent malign interference by foreign actors aimed at undermining electoral processes through malicious cyber activities.
4. **Defend intellectual property:** Prevent ICT-enabled theft of intellectual property, including trade secrets or other confidential business information, with the intent of providing competitive advantages to companies or commercial sector.
5. **Non-proliferation:** Develop ways to prevent the proliferation of malicious software and practices intended to cause harm.
6. **Lifecycle security:** Strengthen the security of digital processes, products and services, throughout their lifecycle and supply chain.
7. **Cyber hygiene:** Support efforts to strengthen an advanced cyber hygiene for all actors.
8. **No private hack back:** Take steps to prevent non-State actors, including the private sector, from hacking-back, for their own purposes or those of other non-State actors.
9. **International norms:** Promote the widespread acceptance and implementation of international norms of responsible behavior as well as confidence-building measures in cyberspace.

Another important step towards enhancing cybersecurity globally is the adoption of the *United Nations Convention against Cybercrime* by the United Nations General Assembly on 24 December 2024⁴¹. The aforementioned Cybercrime Convention, which is going to be opened for signature on 25-26 October 2025 at a special ceremony in Hanoi (Viet Nam)⁴²:

³⁸Paris Call. (n.d.). Home. <https://pariscall.international/en/>.

³⁹Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of France. (n.d.). Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/france-and-the-united-nations/multilateralism-a-principle-of-action-for-france/alliance-for-multilateralism/article/paris-call-for-trust-and-security-in-cyberspace>.

⁴⁰Paris Call. (n.d.). The 9 principles. <https://pariscall.international/en/principles>.

⁴¹Mishra, V. (2024, December 24). UN General Assembly adopts milestone cybercrime treaty. UN News. [https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158521?](https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158521?_gl=1*5j457p*_ga*MTczMTYwNzI1Ny4xNzQyODAzMzU4*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*cZE3NTYyNzkzNzgkbzckZzEkdDE3NTYyNzk5Mzkkajl0JGwwJGgw)

[_gl=1*5j457p*_ga*MTczMTYwNzI1Ny4xNzQyODAzMzU4*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*cZE3NTYyNzkzNzgkbzckZzEkdDE3NTYyNzk5Mzkkajl0JGwwJGgw](https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158521?_gl=1*5j457p*_ga*MTczMTYwNzI1Ny4xNzQyODAzMzU4*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*cZE3NTYyNzkzNzgkbzckZzEkdDE3NTYyNzk5Mzkkajl0JGwwJGgw).

⁴²United Nations. (n.d.). United Nations Convention against Cybercrime; Strengthening International Cooperation for Combating Certain Crimes Committed by Means of Information and Communications Technology Systems and for the Sharing of Evidence in Electronic Form of Serious Crimes. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/cybercrime/convention/home.html>.

“[...] acknowledges the significant risks posed by the misuse of information and communications technologies (ICT), which enable criminal activities on an unprecedented scale, speed, and scope. It highlights the adverse impacts such crimes can have on States, enterprises, and the well-being of individuals and society, and focuses on protecting them from offenses such as terrorism, human trafficking, drug smuggling and online financial crimes. It also recognises the growing impact of cybercrime on victims and prioritises justice, especially for vulnerable groups. It further underscores the need for technical assistance, capacity-building and collaboration among States and other stakeholders”⁴³.

Furthermore, NATO member-states (MS) –in the context of their participation in the Alliance – endorsed the *Cyber Defence Pledge* in 2016 to “[...] to strengthen and enhance the cyber defences of national networks and infrastructures, as a matter of priority”⁴⁴, also establishing a *NATO Integrated Cyber Defence Centre* (NICC) in 2024⁴⁵. It must also be noted that NATO is cooperating on cybersecurity issues with a large number of actors such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU)⁴⁶, while on 4 October 2024 held the first *Structured Dialogue on Cyber* with the latter.⁴⁷



Figure 6: The logos of ECSO and ENISA
Source: ECSO & ENISA

The EU also provides the necessary cybersecurity framework and support to its MS to plan and implement their respective national policies/strategies through several initiatives such as the issuance of the *EU Cybersecurity Strategy*⁴⁸, the endorsement of the *EU Cybersecurity Act*⁴⁹, the *Cyber Resilience Act*⁵⁰, the *EU Cyber Solidarity Act*⁵¹, the *Digital Services Act*⁵², and the establishment of the *European Cyber Security Organization* (ECSO)⁵³, and the *European Union Agency for Cybersecurity* (ENISA)⁵⁴ (Picture 7).

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴NATO. (2016, July 08). *Cyber Defence Pledge*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133177.htm.

⁴⁵NATO. (2024, July 10). *Allies agree new NATO Integrated Cyber Defence Centre*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_227647.htm.

⁴⁶NATO. (2024, July 30). *Cyber defence*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_78170.htm?

⁴⁷European External Action Service. (2024, October 04). *European Union and NATO hold the first Structured Dialogue on Cyber*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-and-nato-hold-first-structured-dialogue-cyber-0_en.

⁴⁸European Commission. (n.d.). *EU Cybersecurity Strategy*. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cybersecurity-strategy>.

⁴⁹European Commission. (n.d.). *EU Cybersecurity Act*. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cybersecurity-act>.

⁵⁰European Commission. (n.d.). *Cyber Resilience Act*. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cyber-resilience-act>.

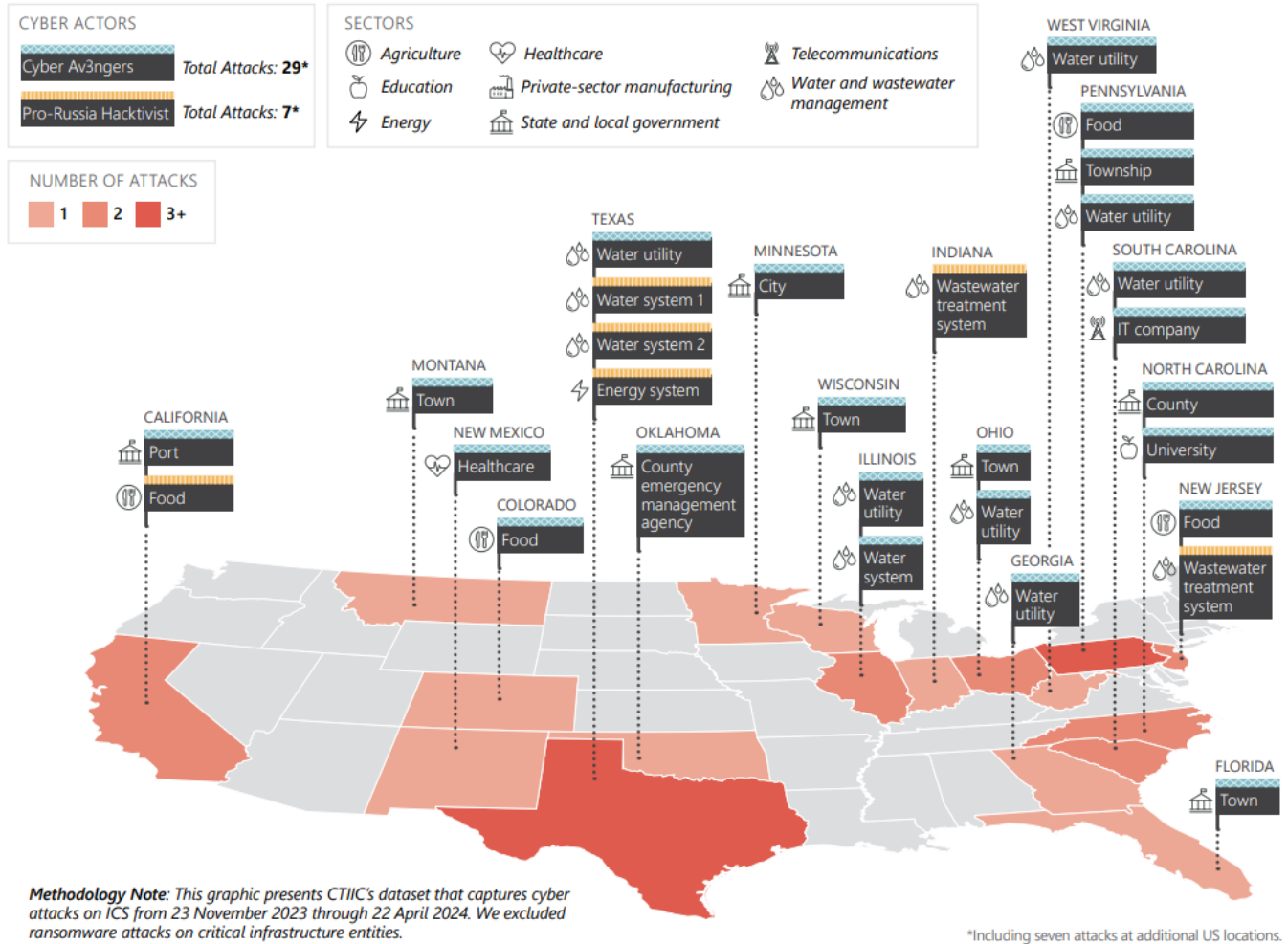
⁵¹European Commission. (n.d.). *EU Cyber Solidarity Act*. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cyber-solidarity>.

⁵²European Commission. (n.d.). *The Digital Services Act*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_en.

⁵³European Cyber Security Organization. (n.d.). *What is ESCO*. <https://ecs-org.eu/who-we-are/>.

⁵⁴ENISA. (n.d.). *Who we are*. <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/about-enisa/who-we-are>.

REPORTED CYBER ATTACKS ON US ICS, 23 NOVEMBER 2023 THROUGH 22 APRIL 2024

**Picture 7: Cyberattacks on US critical infrastructure**

Source: https://www.dni.gov/files/CTIIC/documents/products/Recent_Cyber_Attacks_on_US_Infrastructure_Underscore_Vulnerability_of_Critical_US_Systems-June2024.pdf

Contemporary Incidents Related to Cybersecurity

Regarding contemporary incidents related to cybersecurity, most of them concern *cyberattacks* on critical national infrastructure. For example, according to the *Office of the director of National Intelligence* (DNI) of the United States a significant number of agriculture, education, energy, healthcare, manufacturing, telecommunications, water and government facilities were under attack by actors using cyberspace (**Picture 7**)⁵⁵, while according to Bahadır Candan some of the most severe *critical infrastructure cyberattacks* between 2021-2024⁵⁶, were conducted against the following critical infrastructure:

⁵⁵Office of the director of National Intelligence. (2024, June). *Recent Cyber Attacks on US Infrastructure Underscore Vulnerability of Critical US Systems, November 2023–April 2024* [Official Document]. https://www.dni.gov/files/CTIIC/documents/products/Recent_Cyber_Attacks_on_US_Infrastructure_Underscore_Vulnerability_of_Critical_US_Systems-June2024.pdf.

⁵⁶Canda, B. (2024, October 17). *Top 5 critical infrastructure cyberattacks*. Anapaya. <https://www.anapaya.net/blog/top-5-critical-infrastructure-cyberattacks>.

1. The USA *healthcare system* in 2024.
2. The *solar panels* of Netherlands in 2024.
3. The *water system* of Pennsylvania in 2023.
4. Ukraine's *power grid* in 2022.
5. The US colonial *oil pipeline* in 2021.

The Connection of Cybersecurity with Other Policy Fields

As far as the connection of cybersecurity with other policy fields is concerned, it must be noted that when the cybersecurity is threatened, both public and private sectors malfunction as they cannot operate properly. In this context, cybersecurity is closely related to the following sectors:

1. **Economy:** One of the main sectors affected by the lack of cybersecurity is the economy, due to the restrictions in the use of resources, the damage caused in critical infrastructure, and the disruption of several systems (e.g. stock-market) that rely on cyberspace, thus affecting agriculture, trade, tourism, maritime navigation, and much more.

2. **Security & Defence:** Another sector that is interconnected with cybersecurity is the security & defence sector, as the European Defence Agency (EDA) notes that:

“Cyberspace is today recognised as the fifth domain of warfare, equally critical to military operations as land, sea, air, and space. Moreover, cyber has an additional, horizontal dimension because military action in the other domains is increasingly dependent on the availability of, and access to, cyberspace”⁵⁷.

3. **Environment:** The environment is also affected by cybersecurity, as most agencies/services that manage/exploit natural resources or measure the environmental conditions rely on the proper function of internet.

4. **Education:** Cybersecurity is also connected to education, not only because the personnel that deals with cybersecurity needs to be constantly educated/trained regarding new ways of detecting and countering cyber-threats, but also because national educational data-bases are also being targeted by several actors.

5. **Justice:** The main connection between cybersecurity and justice has to do with the punishment of actors that commit cybercrimes against citizens, enterprises, states or organizations. It must also be stressed that –due to the rapid development of technology– the respective laws need to be constantly updated in order to include new forms of cybercrimes.

6. **Resilience:** Resilience is also affected by cybersecurity, as the vast number of cyber threats not only put the *vulnerabilities* of a society to the test but also affect its ability to *recover*. That is why cyber-resilience –in the context of overall resilience– is nowadays one of the most important capacities for every actor.⁵⁸

7. **Technology:** Technology has a great impact –both negative and positive– to cybersecurity, as its rapid advancement creates new ways and/or methods of launching cyber-attacks but also *countering* them.

8. **Public Administration:** The relation between public administration and cybersecurity mainly refers to public structures (ministries, agencies, etc.) that rely on digital services and/or infrastructure to function. This means that if a hostile actor can cause severe damage to the functioning of a state in case he manages to disrupt the function or deny access to public files. Moreover, FIMI can negatively affect citizens' trust to a state's government thus affecting the outcome of elections, while the electoral procedure can also be disrupted.

9. **Intelligence:** Last but not least, intelligence is another sector that is related to cybersecurity, as a large number of information is being collected nowadays from open sources (Open Source Intelligence, OSINT) using cyberspace. In addition to OSINT, several actors conduct *electronic espionage*, which “[...] may

⁵⁷EDA. (n.d.). Cyber. <https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/capability-development/cyber>.

⁵⁸Koukakis, G. (2023). *Resilience: Highlighting its Importance for Security and Development through References to (National) Security Strategic Documents of International Actors*. HAPSc Policy Briefs Series, 4(1), 77–87. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.35186>.

involve the use of specialized tools to extract information and/or use a combination of threats. Usually, this form of attack is referred to as 'targeted' (because the attackers have very specific goals) having as a goal to intercept sensitive information"⁵⁹. Moreover, several intelligence services have established distinct sections – such as the *National Cyber Security Centre* (NCSC) of the United Kingdom– that focuses on cybersecurity⁶⁰.

Concluding Remarks

Taking into consideration the information presented in this article, it is concluded that cybersecurity is an important component of national security and must not be overlooked as this will have negative consequences in many policy fields. In fact, in order for a state to achieve its overall objectives, it must be able to protect its critical infrastructure and resources from cyberattacks in order to be able to function in a proper way and protect both its citizens and its national interests. The main *challenge* that most states are facing concerning cybersecurity is the ability to keep up with the technological advancement. As for the main *opportunity* that lies ahead, states need to enhance their collaboration in cyberspace with other states, organizations and the private sector in order to increase their cyber-resilience and establish common rules, while some suggest that states need to adopt a *Cyber Treaty for Critical Infrastructure*⁶¹.

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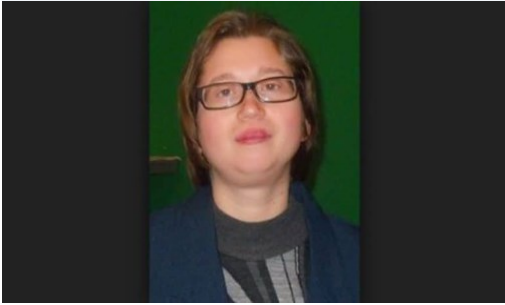
The bibliography used in this article comprises the books, chapters, papers, dictionary entries, articles, and analyses that are cited in the footnotes.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰National Cyber Security Centre. (n.d.). About the NCSC. <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/about-ncsc/what-we-do>.

⁶¹Pawlak, P. & Gery, A. (2024, March 28). Why the World Needs a New Cyber Treaty for Critical Infrastructure. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/03/why-the-world-needs-a-new-cyber-treaty-for-critical-infrastructure?lang=en>.

WATER SECURITY



Water Security in the 21st Century: Global Challenges, Multidimensional Implications and Sustainable Strategies for Water Resources Management

Mona AGRIGOROAIEI (Romania)

Water, like land, borders and national dignity, is a central element, directly influencing regional stability and the possibility of building a common future. Only an approach that recognizes the equal right to vital natural resources can contribute to reconciliation and peace. Water security does not only mean the physical existence of water, but also the capacity of social and ecological systems to maintain, distribute and use this resource in a sustainable and equitable way in the long term. This article is a synthesis intended to bring the reader to a reflection on how complex the water issue is in our postmodern era. Source of life, but also a source of conflicts when it is lacking, WATER becomes not only an indispensable natural element, but also an instrument of power, a factor of social inequality and a test of our collective capacity to build peace, equity and sustainability in a world marked by fragile interdependencies.

National Security – Between Traditional and Modern

The Copenhagen School and the Five Plans of Security National security represents the foundation of the existence of any state, being the set of measures, policies and strategies through which a nation protects its sovereignty, territorial integrity, population, institutions and fundamental values against threats of any nature. It is not limited to military defense, but integrates all dimensions that can affect the stability of a state: economic, energy, cyber, food, ecological, health and even cultural security.

Its importance derives from the very need for security of the human being. Abraham Maslow, in his famous theory of the hierarchy of needs, places security immediately after physiological needs, showing that man cannot think about self-development, knowledge and progress as long as he does not feel safe. This micro perspective can also be applied at the macro level, where national security becomes the basis for the stability and prosperity of an entire society.



Source: <https://www.sparsupplierdevelopment.co.za/details?id=3091>

Aristotle, in his *Politics*, stated that “the state exists for the common good and to ensure a good life, but first of all to ensure life itself.” This statement highlights that the first duty of the state is to protect its citizens and territory, without which no other purpose can be achieved. Traditionally, national security was mainly associated with defense against external military aggression. However, with globalization, economic interdependence, digitalization, and technological evolution, the concept has expanded considerably. Modern threats include international terrorism, cyberattacks, economic espionage, propaganda and disinformation, cross-border organized crime, epidemics, climate change, or energy crises. All of these can weaken a state, affecting its internal stability and external image. Thomas Hobbes, in “*Leviathan*,” emphasized that “in the absence of a power capable of inspiring fear, men live in a state of perpetual war, each against the other.” This realistic view emphasizes the vital role of security: to prevent the chaos and continuous conflict that would lead to self-destruction.

Strategically, Sun Tzu stated in *The Art of War* that “the greatest achievement is to win without fighting.” In the context of national security, this translates into intelligent diplomacy, prevention, sustainable economic development, strategic partnerships, and effective intelligence services, all designed to deter adversaries without the need for direct armed conflict. Niccolò Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, warned that “a wise leader must foresee troubles from afar and combat them in advance, for if you wait until they are close, the medicine is no longer useful, the disease becoming incurable.” This quote highlights the importance of strategic vision and proactive planning in the field of national security. States that do not constantly invest in strategic analysis, intelligence, and the modernization of defense capabilities risk being taken by surprise by threats that can deeply destabilize them.

Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, stated: “Security is more than the absence of conflict. It is the presence of development, justice and respect for human rights.” This integrative perspective shows that national security is not only the responsibility of the military or intelligence services, but of all state institutions that contribute to the well-being of the population, the reduction of social inequalities and the consolidation of democracy. In this context, the Copenhagen School represented one of the most influential paradigms in contemporary security studies, which emerged at the end of the Cold War, as a reaction to the rigidity of traditional realism. Founded by scholars such as Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, the school redefined the concept of security, arguing that security is not an objective given, but a social construct.

Ole Wæver, in “*Securitization and Desecuritization*”, argues that “security is the result of a speech act, through which a political actor presents a subject as an existential threat, and the public accepts extraordinary measures to combat it.” Thus, an issue becomes a security issue not because it is objectively dangerous, but because it is perceived and presented as such, a process called securitization. This constructivist vision led to the expansion of security beyond the military dimension, towards new areas vital to human and state existence.

The five planes of security (Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, 1998)

Military security

It is the oldest and most traditional form of security, focusing on territorial defense, the protection of sovereignty and the prevention of external aggression. Barry Buzan states in “*People, States and Fear*” that “the military remains essential for the survival of the state, being the domain in which physical violence is most directly expressed.”

Classical realism considered military security as the only domain of security. However, the Copenhagen School shows that a state is not truly secure only through the strength of its army, but also through the stability of other planes.

Political security

It aims at the stability of the internal political system and decision-making autonomy on the external level. Threats to political security include coups, widespread corruption, interference by other states in electoral processes, or regime collapse. Barry Buzan points out that “political threats can be even more destabilizing than military threats, as they directly target the legitimacy and cohesion of the state.”

Example: external interference in elections or the use of information warfare to weaken public trust in institutions are major political threats today.

Economic security

Refers to a state’s access to resources, markets, and economic infrastructure essential to its stability. Economic security involves financial stability, the ability to generate jobs, strategic investments, and protection from financial crises.

Confucius said: “A nation without food and wealth cannot have order.” This highlights that economic prosperity is the basis of military and political security. Without a stable economy, a state becomes dependent, vulnerable, and unable to defend its strategic interests.

Societal Security

The introduction of the concept of societal security is one of the fundamental contributions of the Copenhagen School. It aims to protect the cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic identity of a group or community against perceived threats.

Ole Wæver shows that “for a group, the survival of identity may be more important than physical survival.” Societal threats do not target the state as a political entity, but the communities that compose it, affecting social cohesion.

Example: the fear of uncontrolled immigration or the loss of traditional values can generate societal insecurity, even if the state remains militarily stable.

Ecological security

Ecological security refers to environmental threats to human existence and state stability, such as extreme pollution, global warming, desertification, water shortages, natural disasters or pandemics generated by ecological imbalances.

Barry Buzan warned: “environmental destruction represents an existential threat to humanity, greater than any nuclear war, through its global, slow but devastating effects.”

In the contemporary context, climate change has been securitized internationally, with UN climate conferences becoming platforms for establishing common strategies to reduce ecological risks.

Securitization is the transformation of an ordinary problem into a security problem through political discourse and acts that define it as an existential threat.

Ole Wæver explains: “To securitize is to present something as an existential threat that requires extraordinary measures.” At the same time, he introduces the concept of desecuritization, the reverse process by which a problem is brought back into the realm of normal politics, being managed through ordinary mechanisms, not through emergency measures.

Example: migration can be presented as an economic problem (the need for labor) or as a societal threat (danger to cultural identity). It depends on the act of securitization and the audience that accepts the interpretation.

Water Security - a Complex and Multidimensional Issue

The water security issue is undoubtedly one of the most complex and critical issues facing the contemporary world, and its importance has increased exponentially in recent decades due to a combination of demographic, economic, political and climatic factors. The rapid growth of the global population, estimated to reach approximately 9.7 billion people by 2050, is putting enormous pressure on limited freshwater resources, which constitute only approximately 2.5% of the total water on the planet, much of which is inaccessible or difficult to use. This reality requires a constant reassessment of the way in which water is managed, redistributed and protected.

In addition to population growth, accelerated economic development and massive urbanization have led to a significant increase in water demand in all sectors, from agriculture and industry to domestic consumption. Expanding cities are consuming more and more water, and infrastructure often cannot keep up with this growth, leading to significant losses and waste. In many regions, water distribution systems are old and poorly maintained, and access to safe drinking water is still a problem for millions of people. Intensive agricultural practices also require huge amounts of water for irrigation, and its inefficient or excessive use leads to the depletion of groundwater sources, which threatens the long-term sustainability of the resource.

Politically, water security has become a sensitive issue in international relations, especially in regions where rivers and lakes cross several states. Control over transboundary waters can be a source of disputes or even conflict, and cooperation between countries is becoming essential for the sustainable management of these resources. Climate change further amplifies these problems, influencing precipitation patterns and hydrological cycles, causing both prolonged droughts and devastating floods, thus affecting water availability and quality.

In this complex context, a reassessment of water management becomes imperative and involves the adoption of integrated strategies that include conservation policies, new technologies for water purification and

reuse, investments in modern infrastructure and measures to reduce pollution. At the same time, public education on the responsible use of water and the promotion of a culture of sustainability are crucial to ensure that this vital resource can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to secure water in an equitable and sustainable manner.

Thus, in the face of increasing water challenges, the entire global community is called upon to find innovative solutions and to collaborate closely to transform the issue of water security from a source of tension and crisis into an opportunity for sustainable development and peace.

First of all, it must be emphasized that water security involves more than the simple availability of this resource; it presupposes a set of conditions that guarantee constant, sufficient and equitable access to clean and safe water, conditions that are absolutely essential both for direct human consumption and for supporting agricultural and industrial activities, but also for maintaining the delicate balance of ecosystems that directly depend on freshwater sources. Thus, water security is a multidimensional concept, which is not limited to the quantity of water available, but also includes its quality, accessibility in geographical and economic terms, as well as the sustainability of use over time, in order to prevent resource degradation or depletion.

From a quantitative perspective, it is vital that water resources are sufficient to meet the needs of a growing population, but also to support economic sectors, especially agriculture, which consumes most of the fresh water used worldwide. However, quantity alone is not enough if the water is not of appropriate quality. Water quality is essential for public health; water contaminated with bacteria, toxic chemicals or heavy metals can cause serious diseases and epidemics, directly affecting people's lives and causing enormous costs to health systems. In this sense, water security involves ensuring strict standards of purity and continuous control of water sources.

Accessibility of water is also a crucial component of security, because although abundant resources exist in certain regions, they may be inaccessible to local populations due to lack of infrastructure, high costs or social and economic barriers. Ensuring equitable water distribution is therefore a major challenge, especially in rural areas or in marginalized communities, where people may have to travel long distances to meet their daily water needs. This inequality contributes to the amplification of social and economic disparities and can generate internal tensions, affecting the stability and cohesion of communities.

In addition to these issues, sustainable water use is fundamental to prevent the long-term deterioration of water sources. Overexploitation of aquifers, water pollution and climate change are endangering nature's ability to regenerate water resources. For example, in many regions, groundwater levels are rapidly declining due to uncontrolled extraction for irrigation or industrial consumption, and their recovery can take tens or even hundreds of years. This situation creates a major risk, because once a freshwater source is compromised, the consequences are directly felt in all areas of life.

The lack of constant, sufficient and safe access to water leads to serious consequences for societies. Public health problems, such as epidemics of diseases caused by the consumption of contaminated water, are becoming increasingly frequent, affecting children and vulnerable groups in particular. Hunger and food insecurity are other direct effects, as agriculture depends heavily on irrigation, and water scarcity drastically reduces food production. In addition, water scarcity causes massive migrations, with entire populations being forced to leave affected areas in search of better conditions, which generates social and economic pressures in other regions. These tensions can degenerate into social or even armed conflicts, especially in areas where resources are already limited and rivalries for control of water are intensifying.

Thus, water security becomes an indispensable condition not only for survival, but also for social stability, economic development and the maintenance of peace. This requires careful, responsible and integrated management of water resources, taking into account the needs of all users, the protection of the environment and the future of generations who will inherit these essential resources. As Winston Churchill emphasized, "We do not realize how much we value a resource until we have lost it," and in the case of water, awareness and action are vital to avoid ending up regretting what we have lost.

Geopolitically, transboundary rivers represent some of the most sensitive and complex points of tension globally, having a profound impact on the relations between the states that share freshwater resources. Approximately 60% of these vital resources are located in river basins that cross at least two or more states, which creates an inevitable interdependence and, at the same time, a high potential for conflict. In the absence of clear, equitable agreements respected by all parties involved, the management of these resources becomes fertile ground for diplomatic disputes and national rivalries. Water, being an indispensable resource for life, economic development and food security, acquires a strategic value that often goes beyond strictly economic considerations, becoming an instrument of geopolitical power and influence.

An illustrative and extremely relevant example for this issue is the tense situation in the Nile basin, which crosses several countries in East and North Africa, representing the main source of fresh water for millions of people. The Nile is fundamental to the existence and development of Egypt, a country that depends almost entirely on this river for irrigation, human consumption and industry. The construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam on the upper course of the Nile by Ethiopia was perceived by it as a legitimate manifestation of its sovereign right to exploit the natural resources located on its territory, giving it the opportunity to produce hydroelectric energy and stimulate economic development. In opposition, Egypt interpreted this initiative as a direct threat to its national security, fearing that reducing the water flow could lead to food crises, lack of drinking water, and even the destabilization of its entire social and economic system.

This confrontation led to a series of intense negotiations, sometimes tense and without clear solutions, reflecting the difficulty of harmonizing the divergent interests of the countries involved. The political rhetoric in this context was often vehement, and the fears of escalating into an armed conflict were real, demonstrating how easily water resources can become a source of regional instability. This case highlights not only the importance of water as a strategic factor, but also the need for solid and effective international mechanisms for the management of these common resources, based on dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect.

In addition to these external dimensions, water security also has a particularly important internal side, which influences the social and political stability of states. In many countries, especially in developing ones, access to drinking water is deeply unequally distributed, and rural or marginalized communities are often the most affected by the lack of adequate infrastructure or the pollution of local water sources. This situation only serves to amplify social and economic inequalities, generating widespread discontent that can degenerate into social conflicts, protests or even political instability. In fragile states, where governance is weak, poor management of water resources can be a trigger for broader crises, increasing vulnerability and the risk of social fragmentation.

Forced migration caused by lack of access to water is a growing phenomenon, which experts consider one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. People who can no longer provide for the basic needs of life in their native areas are forced to move to more favorable regions, generating additional pressure on local infrastructures, social services and local economies. These displacements can intensify interethnic conflicts, competition for resources and social tensions, which worsens the fragility of the affected regions. In many cases, these migrations cause rapid and unpredictable demographic changes, with an impact on internal stability and national, but also regional, security.

In essence, water security is a multidimensional issue that transcends national borders and takes on multiple forms: geopolitical, social, economic and ecological. The effective management of this vital resource requires an integrated approach that combines diplomatic and technical instruments, promotes cross-border cooperation and ensures equity in distribution. As climate change and population growth intensify pressures on water resources, the capacity of states to dialogue, negotiate and reach compromises becomes a decisive factor for maintaining global peace and security. In the absence of such efforts, the risks of conflicts over water will continue to increase, endangering not only regional stability but also the well-being and survival of humanity as a whole.

Technological aspects play an increasingly important role in addressing the global water crisis, bringing innovative solutions that can alleviate pressure on traditional resources, but their application often remains uneven and expensive, limiting their impact on a large scale. Among the most notable technologies is the process of seawater desalination, which, although it involves considerable energy consumption, has developed significantly in recent decades and offers a viable alternative for landlocked states such as Israel, the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia. These countries are investing heavily in desalination plants, which allows them to ensure the supply of the population and agriculture even in extreme climatic conditions, characterized by prolonged drought and the lack of domestic freshwater resources.

In addition to desalination, the recycling and reuse of wastewater is an innovative and promising direction that can significantly reduce freshwater consumption, especially in urban and industrial areas. Advanced wastewater treatment allows for its reuse in irrigation, industrial processes or even for human consumption, after adequate filtration and purification. However, these solutions require major investments in infrastructure and state-of-the-art technologies, which many countries cannot afford or cannot implement quickly due to economic constraints, lack of qualified personnel and adequate legislative frameworks. In addition, social acceptance of the use of recycled water is another obstacle that must be overcome through education and effective communication.

Technological progress in the field of digital monitoring and smart management of water resources also offers powerful tools for increasing efficiency and preventing waste. Systems based on IoT sensors, satellites and artificial intelligence allow for real-time monitoring of water consumption, quality and distribution, providing essential data for decision-making and rapid interventions in the event of pollution or shortages. These technologies can contribute to more sustainable management, reducing losses and ensuring equitable allocation, but their implementation is often limited by costs and institutional capacity.

At the international level, international institutions and treaties play a key role in regulating and mediating the use of shared water resources, and are indispensable for preventing conflicts and promoting cooperation. The 1997 United Nations Convention on the Non-Navigational Uses of International Waters establishes important principles, such as equitable use and the prevention of significant harm between States, but its implementation remains problematic, and many conflicts have shown that immediate national interests prevail over international commitments. Thus, legal frameworks need to be strengthened and adapted to the current political context.

Regional organizations, such as the Nile Basin Commission or the Indo-Gangetic Water Commission, aim to facilitate dialogue, integrated resource management and conflict prevention among riparian states. However, their effectiveness depends largely on the political will, level of cooperation and concrete commitment of member states. Without strong support from these countries, such bodies risk remaining mere discussion forums without practical results and no real impact on water security.

As for the future prospects, scenarios vary considerably depending on how the international community, governments and civil society will address this challenge. In an optimistic scenario, increased regional and global cooperation, technological progress and the implementation of sustainable policies will allow for effective water management, reducing the risks of conflict and ensuring sufficient resources for sustainable development and social stability. In contrast, a pessimistic scenario, marked by a lack of political commitment, intensifying climate change and uncontrolled population growth, will inevitably lead to worsening water crises, increased geopolitical tensions, the emergence of armed conflicts and major humanitarian crises with devastating effects on a regional and global scale.

Water security is one of the most sensitive and complex challenges of the contemporary world, and the analysis of concrete case studies highlights how this vital resource often becomes the focus of geopolitical, social and economic tensions. As demographic pressures and climate change intensify water scarcity, conflicts and competitions for access become increasingly acute.

A prime example in this regard is the Nile basin, one of the most important transboundary watercourses, which supplies several African states, including Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. The Grand Renaissance Dam project, initiated and built by Ethiopia on the Blue Nile, has generated a deep diplomatic crisis, as Egypt depends on more than 90% of the Nile's water for agriculture, industry and consumption. Egypt perceives the dam as an existential threat, and negotiations on how and when to fill the reservoir have been extremely tense. As former Egyptian Minister of Water, Mohamed Nasr al-Din Allam, stated, "Water is our lifeblood; without it, Egypt cannot exist." This example illustrates that, in contexts of limited resources, water becomes not only a necessity, but also a strategic and political tool, capable of triggering conflicts or imposing cooperation.

In South Asia, the Indo-Gangetic River Basin represents one of the most complex and tense transboundary hydrographic systems in the world, feeding states such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, each facing severe challenges related to water allocation, management and quality. The Indus River, along with its tributaries – the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej – rises in the Himalayas and flows through the disputed territories of Jammu and Kashmir before flowing into Pakistan. The entire hydrographic system is essential for the supply of drinking water, irrigation, industry and hydroelectric power generation of India and Pakistan.

Relations between India and Pakistan have been tense since their independence in 1947, particularly over the disputed region of Kashmir. This territorial dispute has further complicated competition for water resources, given that much of the upper Indus basin lies within Indian-administered areas. Tensions over water have escalated rapidly since independence, with Pakistan fearing that India could restrict water flow, affecting its agriculture and food security, as the Indus is the backbone of its irrigation system.

To avert a major conflict, the **Indus Waters Treaty**, mediated by the World Bank under the auspices of the United Nations, was signed in 1960. The agreement provided for the division of rivers: India received exclusive control over the three eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej), and Pakistan was guaranteed the waters of the three western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab), with certain technical limitations for India in the construction of dams on them. Although this treaty is considered one of the most durable water agreements in the world, withstanding even during the wars between the two countries, it did not eliminate mutual suspicions.

In recent decades, pressures on this agreement have increased for several reasons. First, **accelerated demographic growth** in both India and Pakistan has led to an exponential demand for water for domestic consumption, irrigation and industry. Second, climate change has begun to seriously affect the Himalayan region, where glaciers, the main source of water for the rivers, are melting at an alarming rate. This causes short-term flooding and in the long term the risk of a drastic drop in flow, which would threaten the food security of millions of people. Third, India has initiated several dam and hydroelectric projects on the tributaries of the Indus, such as Kishanganga on the Jhelum or Baglihar on the Chenab, which Pakistan considers a violation of the treaty and a risk of a “water war” through India’s ability to control the flow during critical periods.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict adds a particularly sensitive dimension to the concept of water security, because in this context water resources are not only a vital asset necessary for survival, but also an instrument of power, control and domination, being closely linked to territorial disputes, national rights and self-determination. In the West Bank region, Israel controls most of the water sources, especially the Mountain Aquifer, which is the main source of groundwater in the territory. This aquifer has three main parts: west, east, and northeast, of which the western one is the richest and is largely under Israeli control.

The 1995 Oslo II agreements, which were supposed to regulate the use and distribution of water resources, established a provisional system in which Israel continues to control about 80% of the mountain aquifer, leaving the Palestinian Authority with limited access. The agreement also provided for the establishment of a Joint Water Committee, but critics have pointed out that this body operates *de facto* under Israeli domination, since any Palestinian project to develop water infrastructure requires the approval of the Israeli side, which can refuse for security, administrative or strategic reasons.

In practice, these restrictions are manifested in prohibitions on the construction of new deep wells, the demolition of water reservoirs built without authorization in Area C (which represents about 60% of the West Bank and is under Israeli civil and military control), and the major difficulties encountered by Palestinian localities in connecting to the main water networks. Many Palestinian villages are forced to buy water in tankers from the Israeli National Water Company Mekorot, at prices much higher than those charged to nearby Israeli settlements. The difference is obvious: while the average daily water consumption of Israeli settlers in the West Bank frequently exceeds 300 liters per person, that of Palestinians is often below 70 liters, i.e. below the World Health Organization’s minimum recommendation for public health (100 liters per person per day).

International organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have described this situation as a form of “natural resource control with an impact on human rights”, emphasizing that unequal access to water limits the economic development of Palestinian communities, affects agriculture, increases the risks of diseases transmitted through unsafe water, and perpetuates structural dependence on Israel. Moreover, in Gaza, the situation is even worse: 96% of groundwater is contaminated with nitrates and chlorides above WHO limits, forcing the population to rely on bottled water or small-scale humanitarian desalination projects.

For Palestinians, water is directly associated with the struggle for freedom, dignity and daily existence. Former negotiator Saeb Erekat summed up this reality by saying: “Control over water is control over life itself.” His statement reflects the existential dimension of the problem: without sovereign access to water, there is no possibility of sustainable development, independent agriculture or a resilient economy, which undermines the foundation of a future Palestinian state.

From the Israeli perspective, water security is perceived in terms of geopolitical risks and securing resources for its population in an arid region. Israel has invested heavily in desalination, wastewater recycling, and drip irrigation technologies, becoming a world leader in efficient water management. However, critics point out that this technological progress does not translate into a fair share with the Palestinians, but rather correlates with maintaining strategic control over aquifers in the occupied territories.

Thus, the water issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict demonstrates that water security is not just a technical issue of engineering or infrastructure, but a fundamental issue of social justice, national sovereignty and human rights. Systemic inequality in access to water between Israelis and Palestinians fuels tensions, perpetuates structural injustices and becomes a major obstacle to a lasting peace and a negotiated solution.

Water, like land, borders and national dignity, is a central element in this conflict, directly influencing regional stability and the possibility of building a common future. Only an approach that recognizes equal rights to vital natural resources can contribute to reconciliation and peace.

In South-Eastern Europe, Kosovo is an illustrative case of the difficulties related to water security in post-conflict contexts. After the 1999 war, Kosovo’s water infrastructure was severely damaged, with distribution networks and treatment plants damaged or partially destroyed. Reconstruction has been slow and uneven,

and resource management has been complicated by persistent ethnic tensions between the Albanian majority and the Serbian minority, particularly concentrated in northern Kosovo, where Belgrade continues to exercise significant influence. Access to clean water has become a factor of segregation, as in many ethnically mixed communities, local and central governments do not collaborate in managing infrastructure. Thus, in Serb-majority areas, water infrastructure is often separate from the network controlled by Pristina, and Serbia financially supports these parallel structures, thus reinforcing political and ethnic divisions.

One of the most sensitive points of contention between Kosovo and Serbia is the Gazivoda reservoir, also known as Ujman in Albanian. This artificial lake, created during the Yugoslav era, is located in the northern part of Kosovo, on the border with Serbia, and has an area of approximately 11.9 square kilometers, with a total storage capacity estimated at approximately 370 million cubic meters of water. Lake Gazivoda is essential for the drinking water supply of a significant part of Kosovo, including the capital Pristina, being the main source of water for urban consumption, agricultural irrigation and industrial processes. At the same time, the lake's water is used to cool the power plants in Obiliq, which provide most of Kosovo's electricity, as well as for the production of hydroelectric power generated directly in the dam built on the Ibar.

The dispute over this lake stems from the fact that, although geographically located in Kosovo, the administration and security of the dam are dominated by Serbian institutions in northern Kosovo, supported logistically, financially and politically by Serbia. Thus, Kosovo claims full sovereign rights over the lake, arguing that it is located on its territory, while Serbia claims that it invested in the construction and maintenance of the dam and believes that it should have a major decision-making role in its management. From a strategic perspective, for Kosovo, losing control over Lake Gazivoda would be a critical blow, as it would leave a large part of the population without a reliable source of drinking water and would seriously affect electricity production. At the same time, for Serbia, control or guaranteed access to the lake's water would partially solve its internal water supply problems in the southern regions bordering Kosovo, where there is a constant shortage of this essential resource.

Access to drinking water in Kosovo has thus become not only an infrastructure issue, but also a political and security lever, being used in certain contexts as an instrument of diplomatic pressure. Serbia can use control of the water infrastructure in northern Kosovo in negotiations on the region's status, while the Kosovo authorities consider any limitation of access to water to be a direct threat to the security and well-being of the population. In addition, the lack of joint investments and the absence of an enforced agreement on the maintenance and modernization of the lake have led to the degradation of water quality, increasing public health risks. Pollution, industrial waste discharges and the lack of efficient water treatment facilities amplify these risks, affecting rural communities in particular.

The issue of Lake Gazivoda has been the subject of several rounds of negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade, including the agreement brokered by the Trump administration in 2020. This agreement explicitly mentioned collaboration on the joint use of water resources, joint investments in the dam infrastructure, and the establishment of a bilateral management mechanism. However, the document remained at the declarative level, not being implemented in practice due to the lack of political will, changes of administrations, and the absence of clear guarantees from the European Union and other international mediators.

Thus, water security in Kosovo turns out to be much more than a technical issue of resource distribution. It is closely linked to internal stability, social reconciliation between the Albanian majority and the Serbian minority, and regional geopolitical balance. The lack of a sustainable framework for joint management of Lake Gazivoda and the continuation of this dispute may lead to escalating political tensions, food insecurity, and increased risks to public health. At the same time, equitable management of water resources could become a factor of cooperation, a starting point for reconciliation and an example of joint management of transboundary public goods.

A sustainable solution requires the creation of a joint management mechanism, with the participation of both parties and with international support, which would guarantee equitable access, the necessary investments in infrastructure and prevent the political use of water as a tool of pressure. Only in this way can the issue of Lake Gazivoda be transformed from a reason for conflict into a common resource for peace and regional development.

In Latin America, the conflict in Cochabamba, Bolivia, known as the "Water War" of 2000, is an emblematic example of the tensions generated by the privatization of essential natural resources, especially water. In the 1990s, Bolivia underwent a broad process of neoliberal reforms imposed in part by conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. In this context, the Bolivian

government decided to privatize several strategic sectors, including water supply and sanitation services. In 1999, the international company Bechtel, through its subsidiary Aguas del Tunari, obtained the exclusive concession for water distribution in the city of Cochabamba and its surroundings.

This decision had rapid and severe consequences for the local population. The contract provided for an immediate increase in water tariffs to guarantee the profitability of the company's investment. Soon, water bills doubled or even tripled for many families, representing a huge proportion of the monthly income of poor households. The concessionaire also sought to extend private control over alternative water sources, including community wells and traditional collective cisterns. Thus, vulnerable populations were not only financially affected, but also restricted in their physical access to water, a vital resource for daily life, hygiene, and subsistence agricultural production.

These measures triggered a wave of popular discontent, which quickly turned into massive protests. In January 2000, the residents of Cochabamba, organized mainly by the Coordination for Water and Life (La Coordinadora), a movement made up of farmers, workers, students, and activists, initiated strikes and marches against the concession. The protests culminated in March and April with violent clashes between demonstrators and security forces. The government declared a state of emergency, imposed media censorship, and sent in the army to disperse the demonstrations. There were hundreds of injuries and at least one confirmed death. However, public pressure became impossible to ignore, and finally, in April 2000, the Bolivian government canceled the concession contract with Aguas del Tunari and returned the water system to public control.

The "Water War" in Cochabamba had profound implications for global perceptions of the privatization of water services. Bolivian sociologist Fernando Huanacuni summarized the essence of this social struggle by stating that "Water is not a commodity, but a right of all people." This statement underscores the fundamental principle that access to drinking water is a human right, later enshrined in United Nations resolutions, and cannot be treated exclusively as an economic good subject to the laws of the market and corporate profitability.

The Cochabamba case demonstrated that water security is inseparable from social justice and democratic governance. The privatization of water services, when implemented without consultation with the population and without regulatory mechanisms to protect vulnerable groups, can lead to social exclusion, economic polarization, loss of trust in state institutions and the escalation of civil conflicts. At the same time, this case contributed to the consolidation of the anti-neoliberal discourse in Latin America, being frequently invoked in the electoral campaigns of left-wing leaders and in social movements that support the re-nationalization of strategic resources.

The "Water War" in Cochabamba was not just a local conflict over the price of water, but a major social crisis that questioned the dominant economic model, the nature of fundamental rights and the legitimacy of public governance in the face of global corporate interests. It is a relevant example for understanding the link between natural resources, democracy and social stability in Latin America and globally.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate that water is much more than a natural resource — it is essential for life, a geopolitical weapon, a factor of social cohesion or, conversely, a catalyst for conflict. Addressing water security therefore requires a deep understanding of the political, social and ecological contexts, as well as strong international cooperation. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Every drop of water must be cherished, for water is life." How the global community manages this critical resource will determine not only survival, but also prosperity and peace for future generations.

As water security challenges become more complex and broad, the role of non-state actors — such as non-governmental organizations, private companies, local communities and international bodies — is becoming increasingly important, complementing and supplementing the efforts of government institutions, which are often constrained by bureaucracy or political constraints. These non-state actors bring a valuable diversity of resources, technical expertise and flexible operational capacity, being able to intervene quickly, implement innovative solutions and respond effectively to local and regional needs, especially in vulnerable or conflict-affected areas.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a key role in promoting equitable and sustainable access to water, educating the population on responsible use of resources, and monitoring compliance with fundamental water-related rights. Globally recognized NGOs, such as WaterAid or International Rivers, not only support concrete sustainable infrastructure projects — such as building drinking water supply systems or protecting aquatic ecosystems — but also conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of water conservation and the impact of pollution. In addition, these organizations facilitate dialogue between local communities and authorities, helping to prevent tensions and conflicts generated by limited or inequitable access to water, so that problems can be resolved through peaceful and collaborative means.

The private sector, although sometimes perceived critically due to the trend of water commercialization, makes a key contribution by investing in advanced technologies and innovative water infrastructure. Companies specializing in processes such as seawater desalination, purification, recycling, or digital consumption monitoring are developing technologies capable of radically transforming the way water resources are managed, helping to increase efficiency and reduce waste. Public-private partnerships, when well regulated, can accelerate the implementation of vital projects, while ensuring transparency, social responsibility, and equity in access to water.

Another rapidly expanding area is that of emerging technologies, which open up revolutionary perspectives for monitoring, managing, and conserving water resources. Digital technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and big data analytics enable real-time monitoring of water quality, detection of losses in distribution networks, optimization of consumption, and prevention of pollution. For example, the use of smart sensors in water supply systems can quickly identify leaks or contamination, facilitating prompt interventions that reduce waste and operational costs.

Moreover, desalination technologies based on more energy-efficient methods – such as advanced reverse osmosis or solar energy – offer viable solutions for increasing access to water in arid or coastal regions, reducing excessive dependence on limited freshwater resources. In parallel, advanced treatments and recycling of wastewater allow its reuse in agriculture, industry or even for human consumption, thus contributing to the protection and conservation of natural resources.

Digital platforms, in addition to facilitating cross-border collaboration and information exchange between states, can also support the active involvement of local communities in monitoring water resources, increasing the transparency of management processes and the accountability of all actors involved.

However, the widespread adoption of emerging technologies and the involvement of non-state actors also comes with a number of important challenges. The high initial costs of technological infrastructure, unequal access to technology between countries or between urban and rural areas, as well as risks related to cybersecurity and data protection, represent significant obstacles that need to be carefully managed. Moreover, control over critical infrastructures becomes an essential issue as digitalization advances, and regulatory and oversight policies need to be adapted to prevent abuses and ensure a fair balance between economic interests and human rights.

In conclusion, the future of water security will depend largely on how these technologies and non-state actors are harmoniously integrated into national and international strategies, within a framework that promotes innovation, equity and sustainability. As Peter Gleick, one of the pioneers of water studies, emphasizes, “Sustainable water management requires not only science and technology, but also smart governance and social inclusion.” Only through broad and inclusive cooperation that harnesses the potential of new technologies and involves all stakeholders can water security become a sustainable reality, essential for peace, development and the well-being of future generations.

Water security in the 21st century is a multidimensional challenge that reflects the complex interconnection between the natural environment, society and the economy, directly influencing the quality of life and global stability. Water, as a resource indispensable to life, is increasingly under unprecedented pressure from rapid population growth, accelerated urbanization and uncontrolled industrial development, all of which threaten both the availability and accessibility of drinking water and that needed for agriculture and industry. It is essential to understand that water security is not only about the physical existence of water, but also the ability of social and ecological systems to maintain, distribute and use this resource in a sustainable and equitable way over the long term.

Biographies of the authors



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He has graduated from the Hellenic Military Academy (2002), the Hellenic Army War College (2020) and the Hellenic Supreme Joint War College (2023), with a strong professional and academic background in the field of security & defence, international relations, and adult training. He holds a Master of Arts in International Relations in “Governance, Development and Security in the Mediterranean” from the Department of Mediterranean Studies of the University of the Aegean (Rhodes, Greece) and is a PhD Candidate in Defence Diplomacy & National Security at the same University. Moreover, he is a Senior Researcher and Secretary General of the “Center for International Strategic Analyses” (KEDISA), a member of the “Hellenic Institute of Strategic Studies” (HEL.I.S.S.), a Research Associate of “HERMES Institution of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy”, a member of “ALLILON” (the Global Network of Greeks and Friends of Greece for Solidarity in the Professional Field) and a member of the “Mercury Negotiation Academy” (MNA). He has participated as a speaker in several seminars/conferences regarding international relations in the fields of foreign policy, security and defense, while several of his articles and research papers have been published in many scientific journals, the official “Military Review” journal of the Hellenic Army General Staff, the “Foreign Affairs The Hellenic Edition” magazine, the “Policy Journal”, “HuffPost Greece”, “Geopolitics & Daily News”, “Liberal”, as well as other international relations, security and defence websites. His research interests include National Security, Grand Strategy, EU Affairs, Greek Foreign Policy, Military Diplomacy, Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Cultural Diplomacy, and International & Regional Organizations (NATO, UN, EU, OIC, EfM, etc.). He is the co-author of the book “National Security: Myths and Reality” (in Greek) that was published in April 2023, the author of the book “Armed Conflict & National Security in the 21st Century” (in Greek) that was published in April 2025, and the Academic Head of the Educational Programmes “Security Studies in the Mediterranean”, “Getting to know Security Studies through the work of Thucydides” and “European Defence: New reality, challenges & prospects” of the Continuing Education-Lifelong Learning Center (CE-LL) of the University of the Aegean.



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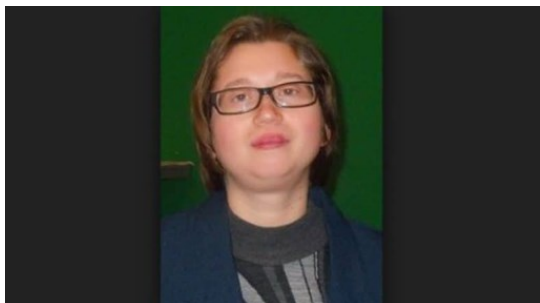
She participated in multilateral negotiations concerning regional security initiatives sponsored by United Nations. She organized meetings with foreign government officials to discuss areas of mutual interests.

She participated to built and updated crisis communication plans to handle diverse situations. She is engaged in public diplomacy activities such as briefings, interviews, lectures and workshops designed for students interested in learning more about Foreign Services careers.





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She majored in Political Sciences - Bachelor and Master in Political Marketing and Communication at “Al.Ioan Cuza” University in Iași. In 2023 she also graduated with a second master’s degree “Security and Diplomacy” at SNSPA, Bucharest. She followed an internship at the “Center for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning during her studies at SNSPA. She specializes in academic research and exploration of Western Balkan political and security topics, publishing several analyzes in the media of this area in various newspapers in Albania , Kosovo, North Macedonia. Also published two books of poems in Albanian language in Pristina, Kosovo in 2014 and 2022.



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He is an aviation engineer and during his doctoral studies he was admitted to the SmartSPODAS Project - “Transnational network for the integrated management of smart doctoral and postdoctoral research in the fields of “Military Sciences”, “Security and Information” and “Public Order and National Security” - Continuous training program for elite researchers - “SmartSPODAS”, in this context participating in various research activities, among them being those organized by CRISMART in Sweden. During the first part of his career, he performed various executive within the Air Force Staff, and in the second part of his career, he was an executive and leadership positions within the Ministry of National Defence. He participated in various cooperation activities at the national and international level, gaining professional experience in the field of international relations and geopolitics. He carried out teaching activities in the academic environment (undergraduate and postgraduate studies).

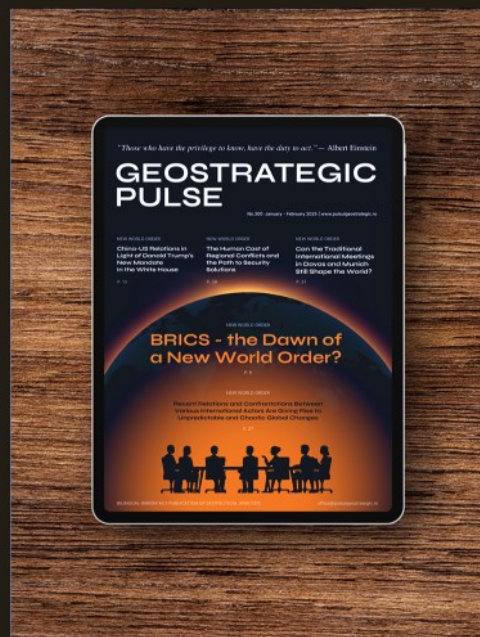




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