

REVIEWS AND NOTES

Dorin Mihai RÂNCEANU, ROMANIA
PART OF THE EUROPEAN RISK ECOSYSTEM,
Tritonic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018, 156 p.

Review by Ionuț HOREANU

Romania part of the European risk ecosystem is a book which managed to extract from a seemingly sterile subject – perhaps with implications strictly related to the sphere of some professionals – an analysis with the true value of a study, by treating in a concise, clear and coherent way a topic proven to be important precisely through the form and content of the research. The book is structured into seven parts: *Introduction, The need to define the concept of security in the current dynamics of international relations, Actions that changed Romania's geopolitics, Use of risk ecosystem in hybrid aggression, Specific threats to the European risk ecosystem, Vulnerabilities specific to the risk ecosystem European and the last section of the conclusions.*

Its aims is to detect the geopolitical issues of the Romanian state, from the geopolitical position of Romania, determined by the military, strategic, economic and ideological dimensions, and to explore the defining elements for geostrategic directions. The author, Dorin Mihai Rânceanu, analyses Romania precisely through the valences of the risk ecosystem. He considers that our country makes a significant contribution to regional and global contingency reporting, articulating the meaning of “interconnecting threats and vulnerabilities in a European risk ecosystem” (p. 9).

Right from the onset of the analysis, after the introductory section, the researcher articulates the thread he will try to follow in the paper, as well as the stake: “interconnection and complementarity of asymmetric threats and vulnerabilities”, which lead to shaping a “risk ecosystem used by Russia in order to change the balance of power in the eastern part of the NATO/ EU flank” (p. 11). In the second section of the book, the mechanisms of the involvement and influence of the Russian Federation is analysed through the three theoretical perspectives of the international environment: realism, liberalism and constructivism. On this occasion, the author points out that Russia’s concern is to ensure the image of a state that does not compromise the principles of international liberalism (p. 13). The pages devoted to the study of liberalism as a means for understanding the „need for security through cooperation” have the role of highlighting one of the positions that Romania must adopt, with the reasons derived from current liberalism (p. 16). Therefore, the author shows that unlike structural realism, liberalism supports the growth of both absolute and relative power. It is important to highlight that the study guarantees the limits of introduction in security and geopolitics. The analysis of constructivism is necessary for the exposure of security mechanisms because the relationship between collective cultural values and the direction of the state at the international level is not excluded. In this way, regional alliances within NATO or the EU can be explained.

In the third section of the paper, *Actions that changed Romania’s geopolitics*, the influence caused by Russia’s position through the “hybrid scenario of taking power over neighbouring states” is analysed (p. 25). In the context of Romanian geopolitics, at the intersection with Russian geopolitics, this section emphasizes the impact that the Romanian state could experience in the case of relations between a neighbouring state and the power in Moscow, if a security risk should

arise. For this reason, the author extensively explores Russia's links with: a) Ukraine – where he observes a double dependence on the EU and Russia, and the role shown to Romania is to counter military, separatist, extremist threats, etc., through proactive actions; b) Moldova, where the author highlights the different situation of Chişinău, which is inclined towards the West, and Tiraspol, inclined towards the East; c) Serbia, a state which does not belong to NATO or the EU, and the steps towards European integration are made with the help of Moscow, an important role being played by the support of Russian gas projects, non-recognition of Kosovo, etc.

Another dimension of the research touches on Russia's relationship with Romania's NATO neighbours: a) Bulgaria, highlighting the dependence on Russian gas (90%), the interests of the Russian oligarchy, the interference in the administration of cross-border organized crime, the Bulgarian Russophile sentiment and the use of the Bulgarians as a Trojan horse in NATO decisions; b) Hungary, highlighting the propaganda messages of social radicalization (xenophobic orientations of far-right parties in connection with Romania and Ukraine). The influence of the events in MENA (*Middle East and North Africa*) on the geopolitics of Romania is also discussed. Attention is drawn to Europeans radicalized on the Internet and connections with terrorist groups, but also to the "Balkan route", because it can lead to an increase in the number of refugees in Romania, in the MENA region (p. 46).

The fourth section of the book discusses the use of the risk ecosystem in hybrid aggression (terrorism, immigration, piracy, corruption, ethnic conflict etc.), which comes with new strategies, instead of the classic armed struggle. Against this backdrop, the involvement of the aggressor state is difficult to prove. A part of the hybrid threats can be transnational networks, from criminal groups in

the drug and weapons sector, financial activities, involvement through facilitators (media companies, terrorist NGOs, corruption of dignitaries, military aggression etc.) (p. 52). Likewise, facilitators can play an important role in the exploitation of decisions with legislative impact, involvement in and through multinationals, etc.

The next section of the book examines how Russia acts to increase influence and, implicitly, power, through hybrid warfare. On the one hand, asymmetric threats (cross-border organized crime, cyber-crime, economic crime, espionage, terrorism etc.) are analysed by facilitators, and on the other hand, unseen directions and levers for the vulnerability of states and cooperation systems are brought to attention (p. 56). These boundaries show how crime networks have been transformed into “interstate structures similar to global, corporate or multinational concerns” for “organizational flexibility and action efficiency, making it difficult to identify leaders” (p. 62).

The author also analyses another phenomenon produced after the disintegration of the USSR, when a network of former KGB officers, through facilitators from European countries (lawyers, accountants, bankers with offshore accounts from around the world) laundered money abroad and returned to take power: “these facilitators have created for the Russian Federation a real network that currently has a hidden power at European and global level” (p. 63). Regarding Russian oligarchs, the author believes that they can be identified as members of an organized crime network – Russian intelligence officer (under commercial cover, especially energy), representative of a Russian company – all three qualities in one person, but also none. This question further articulates the size and proportions of crime forms (p. 69).

The next of analysis is the terrorism (p. 75), analysed from three perspectives: a) anarchist; b) secessionist; c) anti-colonial and nationalist. Multiculturalism or migration can be placed in the same

register. An extension of these can be found in religious terrorism, considering that such groups “transcend national loyalties” by joining volunteers with poor psycho-social training from third countries. This idea is supported by the voice of sociologists (Durkheim) who consider suicide as “the result of poor integration” (p. 87).

An important subsection is the one regarding the threats to energy security. The author analyses the hybrid vulnerabilities of Bulgaria and Hungary, which can have repercussions on Romania as well. Thus, the “roads of Russian energy” to Austria pass through Serbia and Hungary, and the one to the Italians “feeds” the Bulgarians and Greeks. In light of these directions, the “red lines” of the Russia Federation were drawn, so that they separate the European states into pro and anti-Moscow (p. 91). Romania’s strategic partners, Hungary and Bulgaria, have supported Russian interests by setting up joint ventures with Gazprom, noting that national interests may be at odds with those set at European level. The author state that Romania’s relationship with the Caucasus states may reduce energy threats. Eloquent is the Nabucco project which involves the transport of gas from Azerbaijan through Georgia or Iran, to Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Austria.

The penultimate section addresses the vulnerabilities specific to the European risk ecosystem:

a) vulnerability through the use of elements of strategic communication and information warfare, bringing to attention issues regarding:

- psychosocial representation of security – social identities and common values can be vectors of power influenced by soft power, propaganda, information warfare, starting from messages with the myths of war, the dictatorial image of leaders etc.;

- soft-power as a method of vulnerability and radicalization of Europeans - imposing the will on some groups through political, cultural values etc.;
- information war - divided into war of command and control (cancellation of decision-making capacity through psychological mechanisms, due to misinformation, manipulation of information on which the decision should be taken);
- psychological warfare – aims to change attitudes, behaviours, perceptions;
- economic information war – information war related to the economic war.

b) Vulnerability through the use of asymmetric threats in subversive attacks is possible through the following forms:

- racism and xenophobia as a threat to national security;
- hooliganism – a form of extremism and separatism, based on stereotypes, prejudices (e.g. feeling of Islamophobia);
- Euroscepticism and political extremism – forms of diminishing international cooperation – populist parties, promoting the superiority of race, ethnicity, religion etc.

A special role in the information war is identified in the direction of the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) and NGOs. Putin considers Russia “the guardian of Christianity”. Even the European Parliament recognizes the role of the BOR in the „offensive strategic communication of the Russian Federation” (p. 125).

c) Vulnerability through the exploitation of legislative gaps: lawfare, in connection with the information war has the role of abusive use, circumventing or undermining certain legal provisions, claiming to be defenders of certain areas or populations, at the limit of international provisions.

In the geopolitical analysis of Romania, we notice that the international theories and principles also have an echo on the eastern space, where the stake is represented by the increase of the relative power, together with the weakening of other states. The solution required after the analysis of the book is that Romania must relate to risks according to its own security interests. In conclusion, it becomes obvious that we have reviewed a work without *parti pris*, a study difficult to perform, taking into account the objective achieved. The author uses a topicality of ideas and events, and through the connections between them he manages to achieve his proposed goal, to reveal the geopolitical situation of Romania as part of the European ecosystem of risks.