SECURITY CULTURE:
THE CURE TO VOTER DEPRESSION IN ROMANIA

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Abstract:

Toppled with current political turmoil and crises on multiple fronts, Romania has undoubtedly been a highly challenged state since the fall of communism in 1989. Today, the Covid-19 pandemic has amplified many of these crises, including facilitating voter fatigue and depression, behaviours that eventually end up harming democracy. Moreover, the concerning status quo drawn by the last parliamentary elections, scoring a record low number of votes indicates numerous warning signals and asks for a solution-oriented debate between and within political parties, but also with the electorate above all.

This paper entails an original approach by connecting two preeminent phenomena, both having political, social, and economic implications – a low voter turnout, and the global pandemic. As a proposed solution, the research hypothesis is if investing in security culture became a priority, then the citizens' trust in their government would be restored, and the legacy of doubt and suspicion inherited from the communist era would be overcome. The outcome anticipated from building a solid security culture could reverse the ongoing voter fatigue in Romania, leading to higher turnouts in the new elections to come. A stronger bond is expected to emerge between politicians and citizens while the level of trust in public authority would increase.

Keywords: *security culture, low voter turnout, voter fatigue, corruption, Covid-19.*

Introduction

Romania has the second-lowest vaccination rate in Europe[1] and has been facing multiple occasions of collapse since the pandemic

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[1] At the moment this article was written, Romania had 15.633.775 shots administered. More specifically, there were 7.731.860 people vaccinated, representing 40,42% of the

started. Going back to 2020, the Parliamentary Elections of December 6th witnessed the **lowest voter turnout** so far, with only 30% of citizens exercising their vote. Moreover, the latest statistics conducted by IRES showed surprisingly 88% of Romanians believe that the country is not evolving in the right direction[2]. These two pessimistic facts – the first concepts analysed in this paper – are indicators of a low-trust society, a vice inherited from the communist past, that has been troubling the process of governance ever since (Chiru, 2016, p. 280) and threatens to impede it during the Covid-19 crisis as well. This is the unpleasant status quo that has to be changed soon.

The following issue that this article explores concerns an insufficiently developed field in Romania, *security culture*. We mainly argue that the dissemination of basic security knowledge would raise awareness, and the population would gain insight into the most pressing threats, in the end trusting their politicians and experts to apply the *National Defense Strategy 2020-2024* accordingly[3] (Coldea, 2021, p. 50-55). Conversely, the policies created would be granted legitimacy. Bluntly put, the lack of security culture in Romania is damaging the democratic process, and investing in building a resilient security culture shall be accounted for as a solution to the previous-mentioned situation.

All the three key matters unveiled above – low voter turnout, Covid-19 pandemic, and security culture – would come to mutually solve each other and extract Romania from the current blockage it finds itself in if being included in the same debate on the future of the country. Romanian President Klaus Iohannis used a comprehensive concept to clearly describe the state of Romania at the moment: *crisis*.

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total population, according to the data provided by Covidvax.live. In Europe, only Bulgaria topples Romania in what concernes the smallest number of citizens vaccinated, as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control's current statistics indicate. More details on https://vaccinetracker.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/vaccine-tracker.html#uptake-tab

[2] The interpretation of the IRES results are available here: https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/cel-mai-nou-sondaj-ires-ce-partide-ar-vota-romanii-daca-duminica-ar-fi-alegeri-parlamentare-1639263

[3] It is important to mention here that among the threats encompassed by the National Defense Strategy 2020-2024 in Romania, the Covid-19 pandemic is clearly underlined. The document is available here: https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National_Defence_Strategy_2020_2024

To explore the phenomenon of voter depression – which embodies both the cause and the effect of low voter turnout, we ought to engage mainly with quantitative data. In this sense, the latest reports, statistics as well as opinion polls conducted by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES), the Council of Europe Electoral Assistance (Elecdata), and INSCOP Research are given as references. Furthermore, the analysis would be yet incomplete without properly referring to qualitative data and secondary sources. Content analysis is the main research method used, especially to exemplify the main expert and journalists' perspectives on the matters, and then cross-section them so as to draw a general conclusion. There is sufficient literature on the causes of low voter turnout[4], especially in the Eastern Europe region. But, on the contrary, the very limited literature on security culture in Romania demands an enhanced engagement with the topic and the connections with various social and political phenomena.

In the first section, the rationale or causes of low voter turnout would be approached from two perspectives – global and continental, and national (the case study of Romania). The goal is to clearly express the dangerous outcomes of this long-lasting phenomenon. Then, the second section focuses on the significance of security culture as an instrument against voter depression. The three-step approach of obtaining the desired product of security and intelligence – national stability and a threat-free environment – involves security awareness, education, and culture (Furnell, 2017, p. 5).

The main premise of this article revolves around the existing pressure placed on Romania's security system, caused by low voter turnout, and the Covid-19 crisis, which would utterly worsen in absence of security culture, a general lacuna of the Romanian society.

The trust deficit and low voter turnout

Before grasping the concrete instruments employed by security culture, the phenomenon of low voter turnout will be explored, firstly

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[4] These concepts are distinct and it is advisable to treat them separately in order to avoid confusions. Here, however, we envision security culture as the final product to be achieved after investing in security awareness, and education.

alone, then linked with the Covid-19 crisis through a cause-effect relationship in the following section.

The present-day context extends the low turnout problem across the globe, and, implicitly, in Europe as well. Decreased interest for voting in elections is not an isolated phenomenon, but it encompasses rather a trend that has been affecting numerous states across the world. The IDEA – International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance – longitudinal study published in 2016 seeks to reveal the changes in patterns of voting since the 1990s, more specifically, starting from the end of the Cold War. The findings are somehow surprising. First of all, the number of states organizing democratic elections has increased, and the number of people qualified to exercise their right doubled in the last four decades (until 2010) as a consequence of the dismantling of the Soviet Union and numerous regions in Africa gaining independence. Second of all, despite this fact, the general voter turnout around the globe and in Europe has decreased significantly, proving the development of a dangerous trend (Solijonov, 2016, p. 24) that threatens democracy and weakens the state's legitimacy. Whenever a crisis of political participation occurs, a debate on the seriousness of such a democratic deficit reignites between scholars (Cześnik, 2006).

Europe is, however, an exceptional case, the region that witnessed the highest decrease in voter turnout since the fall of communism in East and Central Europe (Solijonov, 2016, p. 26). The perspective of emerging democracies and the event of the first free elections held during the 1990s do not quite match with the current lack of political participation. Hence the low voter turnout trend seems illogical. It is important to explore the potential causes for the expansion of such a phenomenon. Among the factors influencing voter turnout in one country, we could encounter individual factors, but also institutional, economic, social, and political. In addition to these, it is argued that elections are particularly important to a democracy, therefore the lack of interest on behalf of the citizens indicates a democratic recession (Diamond, 2015, p. 141-155).

Arendt Lijphart manifested concern about this trend and explained why it is particularly dangerous. The threat of weakening the democracy does not limit itself to the case of the United States, as it was frequently proclaimed, but it indeed overwhelms Europe as well. His

particular experience with the Netherlands argues that the situation of dramatically low political participation shall be resolved immediately (Lijphart, 1998, p. 1). Besides certain institutional mechanisms which are to improve voter turnout, mandatory voting is the most efficient solution. However, Lijphart admits that it is not at all popular among political leaders.

We shall now analyse the unique case of Romania. The communist past inextricably transmitted the vice of lack of trust in public authorities (Chiru, 2016, p. 280) which led to the pessimist outcome of every election. This reality was visible in the last 30 years of free elections with a voter turnout mostly below 50% (Comșa, 2015, p. 60-63), but more than ever in the last parliamentary elections held on December 6, 2020. Only 31.84% of eligible Romanians exercised their vote, a right which was gained after the violent Revolution of 1989 ousted Communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu. The Social Democratic Party won once again the Romanian population's vote, this time scoring close with the National Liberal Party. But the surprise lies elsewhere. The nationalist, populist rhetoric of the newly-established party – Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) – succeeded in making the threshold of 5% of total number of votes legally required to enter the Parliament, proving the degree to which, the populist wave reached Romania as well (Barberá, 2020).

The result of the 2020 Parliamentary elections features a serious detachment of Romania's citizens with politics and state affairs. This would come as a surprise if we are to compare the situation with the pre-pandemic elections for the European Parliament (May, 2019), during which voter turnout was at a record high 52.8%[5]. At that time, the Romanian population took a stand against corruption as the referendum against corruption took place at the same time, and tried to correct the situation. Hence, two main reasons could explain the pessimistic outcome of the elections: voter depression or fatigue, and the critical epidemic situation, both leading to a record low voter turnout which in turn produced a destabilization of the state's legitimacy. Firstly, being aware of the fundamental problem Romania has been confronting since

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[5] Voter turnout for the 2019 European Parliament elections in Romania are available here: https://prezenta.bec.ro/europarlamentare26052019/romania-counties

the end of the Communist regime – corruption – it would make sense why citizens lost hope in an equitable, democratic system, where their voices matter. This attitude of voter depression is quite dangerous especially in times of crisis, such as the global pandemic. The state cannot act as a good manager of the crisis because the population does not trust its capabilities.

A vivid exemplification of Romania's distrust in their government is marked by the last years' events. For instance, the decisions taken by Social Democrat-dominating Government in 2018 unleashed an unprecedented wave of anti-corruption protests (Luca, 2019). The street manifestations managed to gather 50 000 people in only one day. The population envisioned itself as a force against its own elected government which has succeeded in failing them by trying to adopt the infamous Government Emergency Ordinance no. 13 and interfere with the impartiality of the judiciary and the rule of law, core principles of democracy. Corruption and the long-lasting struggle of the Romanian citizens against it are argued to have led to the so-called voter depression (Scherle, 2020) which prevented them from going to the polls and exercising their rights in December 2020.

Voter fatigue, on the other hand, is somehow different from what has been described above. It rather focuses on the conviction that citizens' votes do not matter and would not bring any change (De Rosa and Soo Kim, 2018). This need for change was unfortunately encompassed by the AUR's performance of entering the Parliament by scoring 9% of the votes. Their electorate claimed their need for a new face in Romanian politics. Consequently, the populist discourse of AUR party[6] managed to capture their votes. Such voting behaviour is vicious for the development of any nation, especially one that had conducted its transition to democracy in a difficult, violent matter.

This chapter particularly addressed the necessity to shape voter behaviour and separate Romania as soon as possible from the *low-trust society* label. The perspective employed focused on the authorities' failure to rather win citizens' trust than damage it, and it also assessed

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[6] *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* run for the first time in Romania's Parliamentary elections in 2020.It is a new party, formed in 2019.

the most recent indicators which confirm the phenomenon of voter depression and fatigue.

The following section correlates the low voter turnout and the pandemic – a facilitator and promoter of vicious voter behaviour and the safe haven for sentiments of suspicion, misinformation, and conspiracy theories that ultimately weaken democracy. By approaching the national security perspective, it would be proved how citizens' behaviour could indeed weaken the performance of national security services and institutions, and, in turn, how this case was facilitated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid-19 – the spark of distrust

Complementary to the before-described perspective, the impact Covid-19 has had over national security systems worldwide is beyond doubt. When assessing the damage produced by the pandemic in the United States, for instance, it is explained how the Government acted in ways similar to the 9/11 catastrophe and charged a specialized Commission to investigate the damages done by the pandemic to national security. This is indicative of the gravity the Covid-19 crisis (Gronvall, 2020, p. 79-84) and the footprint it has on national security. This aspect is especially important since the pandemic increased telework quota, used as a containment measure to the spread of the virus (Minkin, Horowitz, and Parker, 2020, p. 4), and, implicitly, the frequency of cyber threats increased as well and an additional pressure was placed on national security experts' agenda.

The individuals play an indispensable goal in national security strategy as they are the benefactors of the security product in the end, but also the promoters in the beginning. But to be able to benefit from it, first, they have to trust the process, especially since they are also directly targeted by various threats on the security agenda, for instance, cyber-attacks as mentioned above, but also the pandemic. The US Administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama chose to label pandemics as global threats; however, this trend was abandoned in favour of the rather realist perspective on security adopted by the Trump Administration (Hamilton, 2020). Considering the enormous amount of lives Covid-19 has taken in the past two years, the latest approach proved

not so valid. The pandemic is an active threat to national and human security alike.

How the pandemic has shaped public opinion is what concerns us exactly. Restrictive measures imposed by the governments in the first stages of the pandemic caused a general wave of frustration especially among Central and Eastern European countries as it resembled the excessive control communist rulers exerted over the population. The *infodemic*[7] – a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic – fuelled such feelings, and caused not only low trust in the authorities but fostered hate speech and dissent towards the government's strategy of containing the spread of the virus. The population did not encourage the work carried by the national security agencies to prevent, analyse and eventually diminish the threat to national security since a part of them did not believe in the existence of the virus at all, and another part labelled the government as a dictator limiting civil liberties.

Romania's *National Defence Strategy 2020-2024* is constructed around the extended-security definition, going beyond the traditional military lens to security. Irrespective of the perspective chosen, the Covid-19 pandemic is most definitely a concern from all points of view. Pandemics are one urgent national security matter (Coldea, 2021, p. 50),

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[7] The concept of "infodemic" was formally introduced and explained by WHO in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. Detailed information is available here: https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1. More precisely, the term was used for the first time in WHO's Report conducted on February 2, 2020 in which it was suggested that there is an informational pandemic occurring at the same time. Hence there is a need for an effective communication management by doubling the measures imposed since the outbreak of the pandemic. The infodemic situation was problematic in the first wave of the pandemic as it created the gaps instrumental to boosting low trust: "What is concerning in the case of the infodemic is that, despite the informational fluxes rightly managed by authorities, the excess of information coming from unauthorized sources are blocking any possibility of accurate, fast, efficient and transparent institutional communication, and control over the security crisis. Among the abundance of rumors and myths suffocating the informational flux managed by institutions, the panic sentiment inserted in various social categories leads to irrational actions, justifying rather a decline in metal capabilities and contagious emotional reactions, such as creating food stocks for several months, long enough to survive the 'COVID-19 apocalypse'." (Lesenciuc, 2019)

especially as they mobilize the crisis-management function of the state and security agencies.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a right-wing hard-line security promoter admitted that, for the moment, the common enemy for the entire population is SARS-CoV-2. He focused the last months of his mandate, before the 2021 Israeli general elections, on constructing the most efficient national strategy of combating the pandemic (Kershner, 2021).

The European Union adopted a new path towards achieving a common perspective on defence and security, the *Strategic Compass*, aimed at fostering a common, integrated view on the crisis-management, resilience, and capability development of the union. The Covid-19 crisis impeded the operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy (Pietz, 2021), and proved the need for the security and defence policy to evolve and adapt to the current situations. Furthermore, European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence demanded a report establishing exactly how the pandemic impacted the EU's CSDP. The analysis exposed the extensive damage the Covid-19 crisis has had over both hard and soft security aspects, the most severe being the weakening of Member States' trust system, biosecurity threats, and exposure of infrastructures' loopholes, namely the lack of resilience of national healthcare systems[8]. Moreover, the Covid-19 endangered regional peace and stability, fostered mass movements and triggered an *infodemic.* The infodemic succeeded in inserting itself into a weakened social body which allowed the informal means of communication to substitute the formal ones, leading through "cognitive consistency" to the claim of rationality, and giving "rational logic even to the irrational" (Lesenciuc, 2017, p. 82).

NATO also has an active role in ensuring the prosperity of the Alliance throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Assistant Secretary-General for Operations John Manza explains the engagement of NATO with the pandemic as a security crisis, by crafting the Pandemic Response Trust Fund in 2020 and also investing in tight inter-organizational and civil-military cooperation to ensure an efficient and prompt reaction to the

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[8] The complete report can be found here: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/653623/EXPO_IDA%282021%296 53623_EN.pdf.

pandemic[9]. The resilient element of the entire alliance was tested by the spread of the virus. The vision of threats in the current society has to move beyond military and violent means, and include also a much more inconsistent, deceiving, and challenging dimension – the globalized dimension. The Covid-19 crisis makes a perfect example in this sense as Professor and Researcher Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv explains. And the most dangerous aspect about it was the element of surprise. Virtually no one, no individual, state, system, international organization, or Alliance was indeed prepared for the global pandemic unleashed in 2020. Such a realization provokes panic and legitimizes the behaviour of the population – distrust, suspicion, fear.

Such ground does not encourage or favour a prosperous governance process and implicitly the security goals of national security agencies. Bluntly put, it is tiresome to provide security for those who do not want it nor believe in it. The Covid-19 pandemic led to solid obstacles to ensuring the defence goals established in the *National Defence Strategy 2020-2024*.

The very need to rebuild the Romanian society in a post-pandemic era, ensured by the financial instrument of the European Union – *Recovery and Resilience Facility* – was translated into national initiatives. Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan was officially approved by the European Commission in September, through a formal visit to Bucharest by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The financial instrument is divided into six policy pillars, including education, health system resilience, a transition towards a green economy. The reforms stipulated by the Recovery and Resilience National Plan (PNRR), in Romanian – are to be translated in concrete projects until 2026, the latest. Otherwise, Romania could not benefit from the financial opportunity. Given that Romania ranks the second-to-last when it comes to absorbing EU funds, that is a unique opportunity to rebuild the society, but also the external image within the Union. However, for these to happen, there is a profound need for the Romanian population to trust and support the Government amidst such a crisis. Security culture is one

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[9] Detailed information on NATO's response to the pandemic is available here: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_183632.htm

means to achieve this optimistic scenario, as will be explained in the following sections.

Why security culture is necessary?

Monica Gariup defines security culture as a resilient and sustainable mosaic of common beliefs and perceptions towards threats. This uniformization of beliefs ensures the ideal circumstances for national security agencies to properly apply the security agenda. Security in itself has to be understood as a modern inclusive phenomenon that extends far beyond traditional security perceptions of military conflict. Nowadays, in a highly interconnected world, security reaches all societal levels, economic, cyber, food security, human rights, and individual liberties. Hence the task of specialized security institutions is more difficult than ever. For them to be able to fully exercise their competencies, citizens have to be completely aware, educated and involved in the process (Albescu & Pereţeanu, 2019, p. 76).

Both NATO and the EU argued for the value of security culture for the well-functioning of the organizations as it directly involves building a consensus on the magnitude of threats, a clear desideratum that all members can work towards. The resilience of the Euro-Atlantic and European security depends on the formation and sustainable character of the security culture.

There are two central reasons why Romanian security culture could be a reliable instrument in reversing the low voter turnout phenomenon and the wave of distrust when it comes to the Covid-19 pandemic: **gap-closing effect** and the **security risk management potential**.

First of all, as it was established in the previous sections of this article, there is a gap between the Romanian citizens and their elected politicians, inherited from the Communist years, and fuelled today by destabilizing factors such as distrust, misinformation, and suspicion. Beyond the inoffensive suspicion, the Romanian society is fragmented by superstitions and pseudo beliefs. Regarding the current crisis encompassed by the pandemic and the anti-COVID vaccines, the society is divided in three categories. All of them are fuelled by irrational distinct fears: *the progressives*, who fear the pandemic's consequences, *the*

superstitious, who are relating to fears hard to explain, but easily empowered by the anti-vaccine voices, and *the cynics*, who would rather wait a period of time to see the effects of the vaccines on the other people (see the study conducted in September-October 2020 on the Romanians' intention to get vaccinated, by the LARICS Sociological Studies Centre, and the ISPRI Political Studies and International Relations Institute, under the patronage of the Romanian Academy which prove such statements) (Roman, 2020). This phenomenon has the perilous effect of low voter turnout which in turn only ends up harming democracy, and the citizens' well-being. A common vision is detrimental to the well-functioning of a country or alliance and security culture has all the coordinates for bridging this gap. We argue that a *positive security culture* responds exactly to Romania's needs as it gives a central role to the population in the decision-making process. Citizens' opinions become visible tools employed by the authorities to craft a resilient and transparent security strategy. Positive security culture aims to ensure a safe space for the people to be honest and upfront about their needs and wishes and also collaborate with the involved parties (the state, national security, and intelligence agencies, and governmental institutions, as well as NGOs and private actors) to achieve the security objectives (Dekker, 2016).

Such an approach is especially suitable for a low trust society, which experiences low voter turnout caused by voter fatigue and depression. The very focus on the societal dimension security culture deems fuels numerous healthy patterns of behaviour. Security culture encourages solidarity and cohesion among the population and instils patriotic sentiments (Mantea, 2019, p. 200) otherwise wrongfully exploited by populist parties. Alliance for the Union of Romanians' leaders actively benefited from such nationalistic rhetoric. This time, the feelings of belonging could be invested into achieving national security goals and determining the Romanian population to collaborate and engage with their elected political dissidents instead of opposing and protesting against them. Various sociological studies conducted prove the link between the level of political trust and voter turnout. Security culture can inextricably be an active instrument to the ultimate functionality of representative democracy.

Secondly, strong security culture is one reliable instrument that could be used to generate valuable security risk management skills (McEvoy & Kovellaniwalski, 2018, p. 80-81) essential in any governance process, considering the present-day context of the global pandemic. The most preeminent vulnerability of the national and international system exploited by the pandemic was the inability to prevent and the inconsistency of the response mechanism confronted with an external threat. This scenario has been especially visible in the first months of 2020 when the European Union's initial response came with a delay. Even after the WHO established that the pandemic will actively affect the world for multiple months to come, the national authorities encountered difficulties in convincing their population of the authenticity of the health crisis. Such struggle rationally diverted the authorities' efforts otherwise directed to implementing the human and national security goals. In lieu of resources being invested properly in preventing, managing, and counteracting cybersecurity breaches or attacks, the double-threat character migration waves pose (both from a security and now health perspective) and the ensuring of unhindered exercise of human rights and liberties, political leaders had to reduce the trust gap between them and the population. An extensive awareness campaign, various press briefings, and public rhetoric were aimed at convincing Covid-19-skeptics of respecting and supporting the sanitary measures. Among the major threats the Romanian security environment will be confronted with by 2024, populism and the peril of trust in the government's competencies are the most important. The radicalization of the public discourse, a method widely used by populist and nationalist actors has the potential of destabilizing the domestic environment. The phenomenon of rising populism and its effects on the decision-making process has been thoroughly documented, especially in light of the recent events and the pandemic context (Niessen, 1995; Bieber, 2020; Vieten, 2020; Soare & Tufiş, 2018).

Security culture involves above all obtaining a common perspective on the variety, intensity, and duration of security threats. Risk management (the desired product in this case) implies that threats be so well known that a plan could be developed to prevent them. This objective is not feasible in a low-trust society. The Covid-19 crisis

embodies perfectly the new security environment worldwide governments have to adapt to, a mixture of health and administration crises, cybersecurity threats, fake news, economic threats, bioterrorism, and more, but also, human security dangers. Globalization and technological advances nurtured such a volatile security environment that governments have to manage. Maslow's hierarchy of needs-physiological, safety, love, self-esteem, and self-actualization is entirely menaced by the global pandemic. Therefore, states have to rapidly adapt and develop a sustainable and resilient security culture to be able to achieve security risk management skills so as to control the crisis and prevent it from getting out of control (Talbot & Jakeman, 2009, p. 1-14). Citizens' trust in such sensitive moments is crucial to the survival and prospering of the state. To be able to meet the needs of the citizens, the governments have to be effective, prepared, and definitely have an account of how to manage security risks, and limit the nation's exposure to threats.

The first action towards security risk management is risk assessment, which I argue that Romania had trouble with from the beginning of the pandemic. Denying the existence of a deadly virus virtually undermined the government's security risk management efforts and directly defied the state authorities' strategy. Anticipating and acknowledging a risk implies also identifying the vulnerabilities of the organization, in this case, the state, so as to be able to find countermeasures to reduce those risks and design cost-effective solutions (Vellani, 2006). Risk mitigation follows as the second step in the production process of security risk management skills. The approach of European and NATO states was to reduce the risks by adopting social distancing and sanitary measures in order to limit the spread of the virus and contain the risk of destabilizing the economy, aggravating poverty, and damaging social security.

For instance, a National Institute of Statistics survey enlisted the economic evolution trends in Romania in March and April 2020, the incipient stage of the pandemic. In one month, the level of uncertainty about the evolution of economic activity had increased up to 48%, according to managers of companies. Also, the Romanian labour force market was seriously harmed according to a 2021 research on labour

market sustainability conducted by Radulescu, Ladaru, and others. These facts could have aggravated to the level of paralyzing Romania's economy, but, they could have also been reduced if the risk was assessed properly from the very beginning.

The status-quo granted national leaders the tasks of crisis managers, which have pressing duties to fulfil (Borodzicz, 2005, p. 165). Every threat needs a personalized strategy, but for the security and political decision-makers to have the flexibility to design such strategies, the support, and trust of Romanian citizens, who benefit from but also contribute to security risk management is of utmost importance. Even before the Covid-19 crisis, the debate of how citizens expect state leaders to respond to a crisis was ongoing. This issue becomes especially delicate when the citizens do not recognize the crisis or have extremely contrasting expectations from their leaders, social behaviour which harms the logic of representative democracy.

Security culture dismisses the obstacle of distrust of the Romanian population in their government, enabling all efforts to be directed to one single purpose: managing the security risks. To achieve it, two activities shall be employed by the state and national security agencies: security awareness and education when it comes to the civilian population.

Path towards a resilient security culture

To achieve a resilient security culture, establishing and maintaining an appropriate level of awareness and education are of utmost importance.

Security awareness as a process involves shaping the citizen's perception of the environment one lives in from a security perspective. New lenses of perceiving the society emerge hence the citizen will judge the events using new indicators such as vulnerabilities, risks, threats, etc., involuntarily contributing to the process of security management. The final goal of security awareness is to build a solid pro-security attitude, a goal of national leaders as well. The solidarity element will be founded on pragmatic and valid information about external threats which have the potential to harm the unity of the state. Security awareness goes beyond the mere initial assimilation of basic knowledge

and involves a constant reminder of the stage of development of a threat and the strategy adopted by the security agencies towards it (Roper & Grau, Fischer, 2006, p. 22-23). By creating a continuous information-based foundation, a new social contract has the real potential to emerge, one based on trust and cooperation. There would not be a gap between the political dissidents and the electorate anymore since all efforts available to combat a threat ought to be directed in a single direction. The weak point of the Romanian society – lack of trust in public authorities – will become impossible to exploit by de-stabilizing influences such as the populist movements. Romania has the responsibility to provide awareness to its citizens as a member of NATO and the EU. *Council Decision of 23 September 2013 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (2013/488/EU)* underlines the importance of security awareness and education as obligations for the personnel having access to classified information.

An impressive percentage of citizens have to be well informed and aware of the security situation in Romania to achieve security awareness. There would have to be constant communication between the citizens-political leaders-experts in the field in order to achieve consensus on the status-quo of Romania and then work towards designing solutions. Obtaining security awareness would lead to the development of two sets of skills among the citizens. First, threat and vulnerabilities assessment capabilities would be internalized by each citizen, leading also to an enhanced sense of responsibility. Therefore, there is a real chance the people would better understand the necessity of sanitary measures in order to combat the pandemic instead of perceiving them as a cap on rights and liberties. The wave of anti-restrictive measures which occurred in Europe could have been drastically diminished if not eliminated. Second, the individual (in this case, the citizen) would recognize the importance of security agencies in the current society (PCI DSS, 2014). Such a revelation has the potential of alienating the perspective inherited from the communist years on the intrusiveness of the state in private affairs.

Security education, the next step towards achieving a resilient security culture demands additional efforts from political leaders. They would have to direct their efforts towards a more laborious goal,

collaborate with the Academia to provide curricula on security studies. Fortunately, there are various institutions and educational programs active in Romania, specialized in security studies, both military and civic, which we could engage more with, especially in the context of the previously mentioned network of communication between citizens- political leaders- experts in the security domain: "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy in Bucharest, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, "Henri Coandă" Air Forces Academy in Braşov, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, "Carol I" National Defence University in Bucharest and more. Two main activities could be linked with security education – *influence communications* (trying to shift public opinion in a certain direction by enriching citizens with valuable and accurate information), and *public and strategic communication* (constant exchange of messages).

The main feature of security education is to be detected in the post-crisis behaviour of security actors (the Romanian population as well). Were states to have invested in security education, the society would acquire a sustainable character as soon as the crisis passes. That means a fast recovery and restructuring to have a better response to future threats (Wysokinska-Senkus, 2020). The importance of security education is frequently highlighted by private actors as well as it is an exhaustive term targeting economic, social, and political threats and vulnerabilities alike.

Although separate concepts, in the absence of security awareness, and education, security culture has no prospect of becoming a norm in the Romanian society, a fact which would only perpetuate the unsteady status quo which deepens the poor conducts of political and security affairs.

Conclusion

The first section of this article focused on a more sociological approach by analysing the causes and effects of low voter turnout not only in Romania but also worldwide. Both national and international actors suffer because of the low trust phenomena as no process of governance is legitimate without the support of the population. Domestic

protests and dissatisfaction with the political class in times of crisis damage any initiatives of crisis and security risk management.

The second section continued the argument constructed in the beginning but addressed it alongside the Covid-19 pandemic. The global crisis proved that the current approach the Romanian state has adopted so far is neither ideal nor desirable. Low voter turnout and voter fatigue and depression are factors that weaken the democratic character of the state. The application of the *National Defence Strategy 2020-2024*, the construction of a resilient and sustainable society by fully exploiting the *National Resilience Mechanism* made available by the European Union and the safety and well-being of the population demand a strong security culture, especially in times of crisis due to its gap-closing effect and the security risk management potential it has.

The third section elaborates on the need for security culture as the mechanism of overcoming the economic, social, and political crisis embodied by the global pandemic, while the last part expanded on the two pre-required steps for achieving security culture: awareness and education.

The global discourse is seized by low levels of trust, suspicion, and fury, a behaviour most dangerous for any democracy. Through its special status, Romania needs to focus its efforts on obtaining a security culture to overcome certain vices and gain long-awaited stability. Security culture enables the process of governance to function at its full capacity hence national and human security would be safe even in times of uncertainty.

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