In this study, we start from the premise that the isolation imposed after the declaration of the pandemic with Covid-19 forced the diplomatic environment to assume its digitization, following a time when the digital diplomacy held a secondary role on Social Media on the Internet. The pandemic has forced the diplomatic and consular environment to accept their full digitization, almost overnight. It has quickly become a powerful tool for innovation and progress, a reliable element of international cooperation. Then, during the research, we highlight aspects that explain the removal of digital diplomacy from the sphere of public diplomacy. We explain the central mission of contemporary diplomacy with the help of good practices and international cooperation in the field of regional security in the Black Sea region. Then we underline the reasons that could weaken national security. We also set out essential elements that lead us to believe that the digital diplomacy will remain relevant after the end of the pandemic, becoming an important element of interconnection of all stakeholders and a pacifist protector of national security.

**Keywords:** diplomacy; public diplomacy; digital diplomacy; international security; national security;
in full pandemic with Covid-19 have reconfigured professional activities have been compliant, turning an important part into telework. Thus, the world has discovered the importance of digitalization and cyber security. The hypothesis of the paper is: digital diplomacy is more than public diplomacy 2.0; it is a diplomacy of the 21st century, whose central and permanent objective is to protect the interests and national security in the external relations of the states, in all the natural and virtual spaces known by man.

To test the hypothesis, we used the empirical deductive method based on finding solutions to the following questions: Why do we approach digital diplomacy in conjunction with national and international security? Why is digital diplomacy perceived as public only, while other areas include digitization in all its components?

The answers can be found in the sections of the article: 1. Traditional, public and digital diplomacy in the days caused by SARS-CoV-2; 2. Conceptual security through the lens of pandemic and digitalization effects; 3. Regional security and diplomacy on the Black Sea in the digital age. Then, we bring all this to a common denominator in the last section, the one reserved for final considerations.

TRADITIONAL, PUBLIC AND DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN THE DAYS CHALLENGED BY SARS-COV-2

In order to enter the geopolitical area of the Black Sea basin, we pay attention to diplomacy. Diplomacy is the institution responsible for initiating, maintaining and developing relations between states and international organisations through the functions: representation, communication, negotiation, protection of representations and diplomats; cooperation between states (Vienna Convention, 1961). The theory developed for diplomacy is a subject in itself and developed for hundreds of years, both by practitioners and academia.

For traditional diplomacy, we chose three definitions. The first shows us that the historical principles of diplomacy have remained relevant. Baron Cussy (1846, p. 256) defined diplomacy as a complex set of principles and knowledge applicable by diplomats to conduct the affairs of one state well in relations with others, without neglecting interstate public affairs. The second is built through the prism of game theory explained mathematically with the help of Mircea Maliţa. He explains diplomacy as a complex activity carried out in the core of a square, whose sides of history, international relations, international law and conflict theory permeate all aspects of this field subject to continuous change caused precisely by the causes imposed by all components of a state’s life. (Maliţa, 1975, p. 44).

The third argues for the complexity that states face in resolving current issues, either internally or externally: because, if traditionally, diplomacy and military force were the two main instruments of foreign policy today, diplomacy is more than that in the interpretation of Mihai Cercel, as follows (2019, p. 33): “diplomacy carries out its activities in four dimensions: political, economic, consular and public diplomacy”.

Public diplomacy is one of the newest domains of diplomacy. Edmund Gillion imposed the term public diplomacy in the USA academic world in 1965. This type of diplomacy refers to: (1) “the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policy” (Cull, 2020, p. 13); (2) “the totality of the activities of a government that works with non-state agencies and reaches the public and private opinion abroad, which covers information, among others, culture, education, as well as the image of the country” (Rana, 2011); (3) Public diplomacy is the attribute of the power of the state to influence the public of another state through all the instruments at its disposal; this diplomacy is often expressed as having magical powers of persuasion — it can help stop wars before they happen through active listening, efforts to build mutual understanding and promote dialogue and collaboration between country, culture and sector (Snow, 2020, p. 3). This type of diplomacy has more of a public relations connotation, because, in fact, public diplomacy does not exist in the dialogue between nations, as it is traditionally understood, equivalent to politics between nations (Martino, 2020, p. 23).

The newest term in the family of diplomacy is digital diplomacy. One of the precursors is the visionary Romanian diplomat Mircea Maliţa (1975, p. 26), who stated that “the main forms of the new diplomacy are multilateralism and high-level diplomacy. We could also mention technical diplomacy”, foreshadowing the subsequent role of technologies in international relations, in particular, of Intergovernmental Organizations (OIGs) and digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy is the diplomacy of the 21st century, which uses all five of its classic functions that it has integrated into the information system.

Since the emergence of this concept have emerged well-known authors in the field of international relations and experienced diplomats who want to delimit this concept, putting it in a separate niche, leaving aside the possibility of integrating the great formula, digitisation, to the essence of diplomacy, communication of all the types.

Digital diplomacy has a 2.0 public diplomacy component. When we aim at public relations implemented by diplomacy in relations with individuals, media and economic operators in accredited states, especially on social networks
on the Internet, because this space is valuable due to metadata provided free of charge for use in a wide range, can provide valuable information on which political-diplomatic communication strategies can be developed and readjusted (Martino, 2020, p. 25).

Then we have definitions that further complicate the meaning of diplomacy adapted to our times. In this regard, Shaun Riordan differentiates digital from cybernetic in diplomacy: (1) digital diplomacy should “refer to the use of digital tools for the purpose of broadly pursuing diplomatic objectives, and cyber diplomacy should refer to the use of diplomatic tools and thinking in solving, or at least managing, problems in cyberspace”; (2) “Digital diplomacy represents the application of digital tools in diplomacy, and cyber diplomacy represents the application of diplomacy in cyberspace” (Riordan, 2019, p. 19).

Regarding the primary meaning of digital diplomacy, we consider that this is just 21st century diplomacy with a hybridized activity in all possible spaces produced in real time. It can, to a certain extent, reflect the saying “Keep it short and simple”, which came to be communicated under the acronym KISS, because in a world where you have time to decide, respond or apply is almost nil, it is time to simplify the theoretical aspects of (digital) diplomacy to amplify its effects in the field, whatever it may be, real or virtual. In short, our definition of work is: digital diplomacy as nowadays evolutionary diplomacy interconnected in all spaces known to man whose ultimate goal is to protect the interests and national security of his/her country.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC AND DIGITISATION

In general, security is one of the basic principles of state survival. In Maslow’s Pyramid of Five Needs, security is second only to meeting physiological needs; then, we have love, self-respect, and personal development (2017, p. 8). In traditional studies, security is defined in terms of military power and political influence (Buzan, 1991). In this context, in the 1990s, Barry Buzan introduced the integrative vision for security, preparing the meaning of national security for a deeply globalized international security in the 21st century, he conceptually developed national security through the reference sectors of life in a state (Buzan, 2017, p. 28): political, economic, military, social and environmental. Buzan’s approach has become the new form of security studies. In 2011, NATO discussed threats in the information space, the cyber dimension became one of the security sectors (Theiler, 2011).

Perception of security threats through the national security sectors in the light of the technological revolution, natural disasters and the crisis caused by Sars-CoV-2; which is why, in 2021, the world has suspended its peacetime public policy agenda. Panic set in, security and defence of the state became a priority issue for the state, beyond any other political reason, suddenly discovering that digitalisation is necessary evil for public institutions, technological developments and paradigm shifts affect national and international policy in this direction.

The global quarantine has plunged the world into a rapidly receding economic recession in many countries of the world and natural disasters caused by climate change. All this complements the older issues left on the international agenda, such as overpopulation and hunger, polarization on ethnic and religious grounds, inter and intra-state wars, regional disputes, environmental destruction, terrorism, organized crime, acts of violence against one’s own people, of states, epidemics, and crime of all kinds. We are no longer favoured at national level either, even if it is proven that the member states of the European Union (EU) are safer. We have to manage the surcharge of energy and drinking water. We are close to economic collapse and social unrest, we are moving quickly towards a society where human rights are restricted in the name of public order, but without these restrictions on rights being specified and when these restrictions apply. The enactment of such rules should be assumed on time, to be the responsibility of decision makers.

Most of the issues listed in the previous paragraph no longer differentiate between internal and external threats. The difference lies in how they are managed. These characteristics make it almost impossible for classical interpretations to delimit the security domain to the area provided for in the classical security agreement. For this reason, we have a perception of security that tends to expand and deepen, it resizes the paradigms of international security studies through the security complex. This is not a new one, but it remains quite current because the complex security phrase in the analysis of security dimensions is “a group of states whose first security concerns bind them together closely enough that their national security cannot be realistic, considered separately from each other” (Alagappa, 1988, pp. 54-55).

Although the security complex is not valid for the states bordering the Black Sea, we introduce in our topic three political-diplomatic steps taken in the Black Sea area in terms of security.
REGIONAL SECURITY AND DIPLOMACY
ON THE BLACK SEA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Public data from the historian of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) shows that, thanks to Turkey, for decades, NATO did not conduct any military exercises in the Black Sea area, which induced a lasting peace in this region, given the fact that, during the Cold War, the Black Sea was a space of ideological confluence for the two colossi of the nearly 50 years, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America (USA). The US exists by proxy in this area, Turkey being a NATO member state, a politico-military alliance of Western democrats. The rest belonged to the Communist Bloc, the intergovernmental organization (OIG) in the mirror, that of the Warsaw Pact. Ukraine, Russia and Georgia were component states of the USSR, Bulgaria and Romania were members of the treaty until after 1990. After 20 years, in 2021, the situation has become more complicated. Romania, Turkey and Bulgaria are members of NATO, Ukraine and Georgia are independent states, strongly affected by the policies and actions taken by the de facto heiress after the dismantling of the USSR, the Russian Federation.

Therefore, as a state bordering the Black Sea, Romania is located at an impressive intersection of values, cultures, and different regional security systems. The six riparian states are forced to cooperate, no matter what each one wants.

In 2014, the Russian Federation re-incorporated the Crimean Peninsula into its vast territory. An extremely important part of the territory of Ukraine from a geostrategic point of view would affect the international system, especially the former communist and ex-Soviet states. Romania has become a neighbour of Russia because the exclusive economic zone of the riparian states is a maximum of 200 nautical miles, and the distance from Sulina in Romania to Olenivka in Crimea is only 226 km.

In this context, things got complicated for Romania, even if the situation at the post-Cold War geopolitical level had not been very calm. For example, the recognition of the Black Sea Snake Island as Romanian territory by Ukraine had to be recognised through international justice. In this situation, international treaties, membership of relevant regional and international IGOs, as well as the establishment of regional working groups are welcome.

Among the working groups on the Black Sea riparian states, the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Working Group (BLACKSEAFOR) in 2001, the Three Seas Initiative (I3M) and New Bucharest (99) are the most edifying for our topic because the emergence of these initiatives and working groups reflect regional responses to the emergence of threats to national security at the time, after which state actors came together, as follows:

a. **Black Sea Naval Cooperation Working Group (BLACKSEAFOR)**

The first cooperation was born as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the USA. Terrorism had reached a global level, for which NATO has adapted its defence strategy. One of NATO’s major players, Turkey has proposed a permanent presence on the Alliance’s eastern border on the Black Sea. Thus, Turkey invited the states bordering the Black Sea to join this idea. BLACKSEAFOR was signed in 2001 by all six states. It reiterates the articles set out in the Montreux Straits Convention (1936). The Agreement of April 2, 2001 on the establishment of the naval cooperation group in the Black Sea, voted by the Romanian Parliament the following year, provided for the following (2002): “1. in order to contribute to the further strengthening of friendship, good relations and mutual trust between the states bordering the Black Sea, as well as to strengthen peace and stability in the region by developing cooperation and interoperability between naval forces. 2. The missions are: a) search and rescue operations; b) humanitarian assistance operations; c) measures to combat mines; d) environmental protection operations; e) visits to good offices; f) any other missions agreed by all parties”.

The peak years of this group were in 2004 and 2005. The peak coincides with the admission of Romania and Bulgaria to NATO in 2004. Subsequently, the two were received in the European Union in 2007. So, in 2007, we had three NATO member states; two members of the Partnership for Peace, a pre-accession program of states wishing to become NATO and Russia member states, with a separate partnership signed with NATO. The solution for cooperation between the states bordering the Black Sea was found in another direction. The actions of this group have been integrated into a comprehensive area, that of the 57 member states within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This regional cooperation includes almost all those established in 2001.

The situation in the six states has changed since 2014, when diplomatic signals indicated that Ukraine would be relinquished after the loss of Crimea and the problems caused by separatists in the east of the country, in Donbass and Luhansk provinces, but Kiev leaders are aware that above pride, they must convince the international community with the help of diplomatic tools, they have no other chance. Thus, the meetings of the OSCE initiative continue.
From here we have two plans in mind. One national and the other regional.

Romania is not indifferent to what happened to Ukraine, but Ukraine has no choice. On the one hand, Russia considers Crimea as Russian territory, Ukraine considers it Ukrainian. A war with Russia, a great nuclear power, is impossible for any state or international organization. At the national level, let us remember that, above all, it is the national interest and it may be time to try to rebuild ties with Russia and try to become an interconnector in relations with other riparian states, and if we fail, to maintain our neutrality, because Ukraine is a fairly large state. has the necessary tools to be able to negotiate effectively with Russia. Then we should not forget that the two are sister states, that sooner or later they will find a compromise solution. At the regional level, perhaps we should think of ourselves as on the border of a new amber road. The old road left Northern Scandinavia and reached the heart of the Roman Empire, whose border was outside today’s Romania. At present, we would be inside, and, implicitly, it would be in the interest of NATO and the EU. It would be time to show that we have learned something from the past in this whole process of reconfiguring regional security interests in the Black Sea area, from the north to the south.

If on the west-east axis of the Black Sea, the riparian states do not have cross-border geopolitical ambitions, on the north-south axis we have the most relevant shore north of the Black Sea and both sides of the Kerch Strait are under de facto Russian domination. The Crimea Peninsula has long been the spearhead of the Red Army with a 25-year break. At present, the ports of the peninsula are the crown of Russian naval power for Europe.

This politico-military crisis has upset the international system. This led to the reorganization of the EU and NATO member states.

b. The Three Seas Initiative

This diplomatic variant of cooperation of 12 EU member states has been configured as a response to the diversification of threats to state security, becoming a real transdisciplinary project for states bordering the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas. Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia decided in 2016 to build an informal platform to increase convergence and economic cohesion and interconnectivity in the fields of energy, transport and digital (www.mae.ro). Its principles are interconnectivity and digitalisation, promoting economic development, increasing cohesion at European level and strengthening transatlantic links (Ibid).

c. Bucharest Format 9 (B9)

This type of cooperation and dialogue on regional security issues at the level of NATO member states was initiated by Romania and Poland in 2014. The targeted states were NATO members. At present, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia are cooperating in the field of common security interests, in full accordance with the principles of solidarity and indivisibility of NATO member security, cyber security, cyber threats, hybrid tactics and cross-border online and offline crime (http://mae.gov.ro/node/43571).

This security cooperation also involves holistic components, integrating programs from other relevant IGOs, such as the EU and the OSCE, one of which is the OSCE Open Skies Treaty (Ibid).

Unlike B9 and I3M, BLACKSEAFOR is no longer important, neither on the agenda of the Romanian government’s security policies nor on the agendas of the other five states. By putting on the agenda of the 57 OSCE states, the interest for this subregion has been dispelled, although we have signals from all security sectors that the Black Sea region is sensitive to porous borders that can profoundly affect Europe. States will continue to face problems such as those presented at the beginning of this article and, in particular, with illegal migration.

Without going into the complex issues of the social and economic dimensions, we emphasize only two aspects, cybercrime and illegal migration. They meet all the valences to become disruptive policies with great inconveniences, significant material damages, but about which they are not debated in proportion to the problems created for public institutions, economic operators and simple individuals. Only for these disruptive factors, migration and cyber security, geostrategic agreements built on the core of proactive common interstate policies would be needed, especially with neighbouring states, but the organisation of the six Black Sea riparian states is not realistic in 2021.

We have the opportunity to negotiate bilateral agreements with each of the five states. If the issue of migration is on the agenda of states, the issue of digital space is not yet explored. It is time to sign bilateral non-aggression agreements. We already have examples of this. One of them is the 2015 US-China Cybersecurity Agreement. In 2015, Obama and Xi Jinping signed a bilateral agreement to prevent cyber espionage.

Between the two countries, especially for the economic and commercial environment, the theft of intellectual property and trade secrets (Louie, 2017).
We emphasize that it is one of the first treaties whose main subject is the cybernetic dimension without commenting on its success.

In the current international context, we have indications that subregional security has returned today, offering real development valances, especially since Britain withdrew from the EU, Europe is de-Americanized, Germany strengthens its political and economic relations with Russia, France returns to anti-American Gaullist policy.

In 2021, after the gradual indications provided in the international system since the first Obama administration (2009-2013), the US shows that it has changed its foreign policy strategy for this century, their interest in Europe is declining, the Pacific area has begun to be predominant, regardless of the political colour of the three presidents, Obama, Trump or Biden. The most recent actions in favour of this statement are the changes brought about by the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Partnership between the USA, Great Britain and Australia (AUKUS), signed in September 2021 (Liptak & Vasquez, 2021). The trilateral “autocracy versus democracy” is a program of meetings in the coming months to coordinate on cyber issues, advanced technologies and defence, in an attempt to better meet modern security challenges (Ibid.).

The quarantine imposed worldwide forced the diplomatic environment to assume its digitalization, after it had reserved for digital diplomacy a secondary role on Social Media on the Internet. The pandemic forced the diplomatic and consular environment to accept digitisation in its entirety, almost overnight, quickly becoming a powerful tool for innovation and progress, a reliable element of intra-institutional and interstate bi/multilateral cooperation. Then, during the research, we will highlight aspects that explain the removal of digital diplomacy from a niche of public diplomacy conducted on social networks; which is in fact the role of this diplomacy in a deeply polarised international area that can have the effect of weakening national security.

**ULTIMA RATIO**

Throughout the article, we highlighted aspects that favour digital diplomacy as an integrative diplomacy for all spaces and with all possible tools. It is more than public diplomacy because we are dealing with all types of international actors, not just the non-diplomatic side. Also through digital diplomacy we have a new component to build, that of coding the information space, then integrating it into international law.

The next area addressed was security. We addressed security, national and international security. We limited ourselves to three types of cooperation and they were all from the Black Sea area. I did not enter into wider debates because space does not allow.

We have developed the most important goal of security, protection and survival of the state, which is the same for diplomacy. If we thus debate security and diplomacy, then the two remain permanently in tandem, one by force, the other by influence, negotiation and persuasion.

The working hypothesis is confirmed. All the essential key elements presented during this approach lead us to believe that digital diplomacy will remain relevant after the end of the pandemic, as an important element of interconnection of all stakeholders, because:

We have cross-border digital space available almost free of charge, but almost permanently subject to threats, security can be ensured almost entirely on the Internet, if people are willing to follow basic rules. National security has integrated the digital space, becoming a generous ecosystem, in which the domestic domain overlaps the international domain in a way that people are no longer perceived according to age, gender, ethnicity, religion but rather as a citizen of the world.

In the information age deeply affected by the pandemic, climate change and inadequate public policies, we have the chance to review strategies and tactics based on context, to introduce proactive activities, such as: initiation, negotiation of new rules, bilateral and multilateral agreements for states to survive. all this hybridised space; then, after signing them, the security and defense media take over to monitor how these rules are followed in order to be able to alert the responsible forums in time in case of incidents.

An effective approach to diplomacy is the power and influence perceived by all stakeholders, international actors and the general public in all possible areas, without knowing how efficiency has been achieved, without going into the essence of its practice. However, this aspect can only be a level of perception analyzed without leading to the cause of the problem, because without knowing the context and the actors, it should not judge a priori.

In the case of digital diplomacy, we have authors who build complicated concepts for restricting activities to small niches; but the result is only confusing the quid pro quo. We end up not understanding anything and if we do not understand, we forget or refuse it. We are no longer interested in finding out that digital diplomacy is just a resilient diplomacy in the face of shocks assimilated after the integration...
into diplomatic practice of techniques and technologies adapted to the times, innovation and progress of mankind.

Actually, we consider that digital diplomacy has become an interface of the hybridised state and the promoter of national security for the weakened Westphalian state in the international system. Both exponents of foreign policy, diplomacy and defence, have a common mission, to ensure that the state and the nation survive in an extremely complex world in terms of security. This mission seems to consist of simple routine actions, but when they need to be put into practice, they become complicated in proportion to the situational context of the chosen moment.

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