

## CIVILIAN PREPAREDNESS FOR CRISIS SITUATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SECURITY CULTURE IN ROMANIA

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*The civilian population is an important element for any security system of any given state. It participates, either actively or passively, in crisis situations or conflicts, and the assurance of its general welfare represents a major policy objective. From this point of view, the states have the obligation to prepare the civilian population to anticipate and become aware of the risks and the necessary measures, imposed by the alteration of the overall state of security. The main objective of this paper is to analyse the civilian preparedness and the development of security culture in Romania, from the perspective of the mechanisms, measures and policies implemented in the field by the Romanian state.*

*Keywords: civilian resilience; security culture; civil-military relation; national security; hybrid warfare;*

### INTRODUCTION

According to the Convention of Montevideo, the permanent population represents one of the main conditions of statehood (Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, 1993). The population contributes, fundamentally, to the functioning of the social and political apparatus, to the economic system, being the main source from which the state derives its sovereign prerogatives. As such, possessing a fundamental characteristic, it cannot be excluded from crisis situations or conflicts that occur upon the state's territory. International law makes a concise distinction between combatants and civilian population. Article 51 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions offers extended protection, from the ban upon indiscriminate attacks to exclusion of civilian population as a legitimate military target (Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, 1977).

The special status granted to them does not completely exclude the civilian population from a conflict. Civilians can act and participate by supporting the state's efforts without losing their non-combatant status. In this regard, the European Union's sanctions packages against Russia are notable. They include sanctions on civilian companies in aviation, transportation, gas, and oil, as well as on individuals involved as non-combatants who provide material support or promote state propaganda (Farmer, Booth, Karaman, 2024).

The evolution of hybrid warfare in recent years has accelerated the involvement of civilian population, currently, with hostile actions increasingly directed at the civilian sector rather than defence institutions. As such, the civilian population becomes a target and a means of defence through ensuring unity, homogeneity and by commitment to each individual role, within the framework of the state.

Starting from the importance of civilian population in ensuring national security, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate the level of preparedness in critical situations for the accomplishment of general resilience of the state. Security culture is relevant because it represents an effective tool to create an advanced level of consciousness within the civilian population, thus offering the civilians the capacity and necessary information. The main goal of the security culture is the preparation of civilians

to defend the national values against a potential adversary. The civilian population requires a high level of knowledge, as to act pro-actively and to streamline the state's intervention in times of crisis or conflict.

### CURRENT STATE OF CIVILIAN POPULATION PREPARATION AND SECURITY CULTURE IN ROMANIA

The Romanian State has become aware of the importance of civilian population and the role that civilians have in maintaining security and preventing crisis situations or conflicts. It is remarked that, within the *National Defence Strategy for the 2020-2024 period*, one of the action lines for crisis management is presented as follows: *“Preparing institutions and the population for crisis situations and civil emergencies, including through the conduct of exercises and mobilization training, as well as through international cooperation”* (Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării, 2020, p. 36). From this point of view, the preparation of civilian population and, also, of relevant institutions represents the means to achieving the national security objectives and the country's defence.

It is important to add the fact that the security culture aspect has been covered, being affirmed as a capability of resilience, its development being of absolute necessity for the integration of national security values (Ib., p. 10). The low level of security culture is presented as a vulnerability, its absence making the interference of hostile entities possible (Ib., p. 29). As such, the decision-making apparatus remarks the lack of a satisfactory security culture level of the population.

To understand the necessity of a security culture, it is essential to present the definition provided by the Guide of the National Defence Strategy from 2015, which is also used for the present document: *“[...] the totality of values, norms, attitudes, or actions that determine the understanding and assimilation of the concept of security and its derivatives at the societal level (national security, international security, collective security, insecurity, security policy etc.)”* (Ghidul Strategiei Naționale de Apărare a Țării, 2015, p. 7).

Likewise, it must be mentioned that the notion of security culture has a purely educational dimension, representing the capacity for awareness and the application of an appropriate attitude aimed at contributing to the prevention of insecurity situations and the defence and protection of oneself, one's property, the community, and, obviously, the state as a whole. The Guide affirms the importance of security

culture and the awareness of security elements by the civilian population, elements which are absolutely necessary for maintaining internal security (Ib.).

Another important element of the National Defence Strategy's Guide is the introduction of the *extended national security* – a concept that is used by both the 2015 Strategy and the present one. From this point of view, the decision-makers have observed a need for differentiating between the terms of security and defence, whose distinctions are not explained in detail, but merely state the presence of some unexplained differences. The role of *extended national security* is to replace the strategic univalence of the term *“security”*, which was associated, strictly, with territorial defence, with the objective of extending the notion of security in wider spheres such as: economy, health and transportation (Ib., p. 13).

This aspect creates more issues, in theory, because the terms *“security”* and *“defence”* have clear conceptual delimitations and the integration of both in an unitary form could create more confusion regarding theory. However, this new term creates a new value for the civilian population. Affirming the extension of the notion of *“security”* over other environments, it means that the mentioned institutions, which are not specialized in this aspect, will participate directly in the process of maintaining security. From this point of view, the need for security culture development and the preparedness of civilian population for situations of insecurity, crisis or conflict is even more necessary.

Law no. 481/2004 regarding civilian protection envisions in article 3, letter C: *“Informing and preparing the population in advance regarding the dangers they are exposed to, the self-protection measures that must be taken, the available protection means, the obligations they have, and the actions to be taken during an emergency situation”* (Legea nr. 481 privind protecția civilă, 2004, p. 1).

The citizens receive a series of obligations in regards to civilian protection, according to law, such as: complying with the rules established by local or central authorities, taking civilian protection measures, allowing the access of the forces and the means of intervention within the boundaries of one's property, executing emergency evacuations from affected areas etc. (Ib., p. 7).

Irrespective of their status, according to the Constitution of Romania, each citizen is obliged to participate in the country's defence process (Constituția României, 2003, p. 23). As a consequence, the civilian population requires preparation from the state. Considering that the extended national security covers a large area

of fields from health, to economy and to the cyberspace – it is to be noted that while they are integrated actors of the security system, a large portion of the population is not specialised for this purpose.

The Department for Emergency Situation within the Ministry of Internal Affairs implements collaborative projects regarding civilian population, co-operating with the local population, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. These projects stipulate a series of exercises, considering the population's mentality during emergency situations, the continuation of governance, and testing reaction time. They are intended to contribute to the civilian resilience development, improvement of professional preparedness as well as to observe vulnerabilities, gaps or issues (Department for Emergency Situations, *Civil-Military Cooperation in the Field of Civilian Protection and Emergency Management*, 2021).

A concrete example is represented by the *Seism 2018* exercises, organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs through the Department of Emergency Situations. The exercise's scenario is based upon a hypothetical earthquake with a magnitude of 7.5 Richter, in Vrancea county, which has produced ample material destruction – from administrative buildings to critical infrastructure. Within the *Seism 2018* exercise, the Defence Staff actively participated by engaging 1,000-strength military personnel. The specific missions of the exercise included the installation and operation of campaign hospitals, medical evacuations, identification of material losses and victims (Exercise *Seism 2018*, Agenția Media a Armatei, 2018).

Regarding security culture, the Romanian Intelligence Service promotes a series of prevention and intervention programs such as: *“Radicalisation Awareness Network, Community Policing Preventing Radicalisation, CLEAN-IT, First Line Against Radicalisation”* (Stan, Stăiculescu, Predoană, 2023 pp. 83-84). These programs have the main purpose to curb radicalism and terrorist ideologies through prevention, detection and information. For example, *CLEAN-IT* works with eliminating terrorist activities from the on-line channels within the European Union. *“First Line Against Radicalisation”* oversees the training of police officers to properly detect radicalised individuals (Ib.). Actions regarding security culture development could be put in motion by other state institutions, governmental and non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, as long as they are supervised and coordinated by the Supreme Council for the Country's Defence (Mantea, 2019, p. 202).

To maintain a connection between civilian population and state institutions that are relevant for crisis and conflict situations (such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of National Defence, the Romanian Defence Staff etc.), they use strategic communication and public information structures, through media (Ib., pp. 201-202). In practice, the preparation of civilian population regarding defence is mentioned in article 2, paragraph 1 of Law no. 446/2006: *“The preparation of Romanian citizens for defence represents the totality of measures and actions taken to ensure the human resources necessary for the armed forces and other forces provided by public defence, public order, and national security institutions, according to the law, hereinafter referred to as institutions with responsibilities in the field of defence and national security. This includes recruitment, selection, training, and assignment to the units of the respective institutions”* (Legea actualizată nr. 446/2006 privind pregătirea populației pentru apărare, 2012). In this regard, the law affirms through article 2, paragraph 2, that the civilian preparedness can be realised through two means: *“a) fulfilling military service; b) participating in other forms of training organized by the country's defence and national security institutions”* (Ib.)

A main issue in regards to this law is its topicality, the last modification occurring in 2012. The conflictual phenomenon has been modified, including more profoundly the civilian element and the non-military side. As such, I consider that there is a need to update it to include civilian preparedness for resilience against hybrid attacks.

### THE LEVEL OF SECURITY CULTURE – A VULNERABILITY

As mentioned in the *National Defence Strategy for the 2020-2024 period*, it is considered that the security culture low level constitutes a vulnerability, in regard to disinformation and hostile hybrid actions. In this context, it is necessary to analyse the current level of security culture to understand how problematic this issue is. In this regard, the National Strategy lacks a wider perspective. Even if some works that analyse the level of security culture utilise, as a main source, the LARICS Security Culture Barometer (Mantea, ib.; Nistor, 2023), it can be considered outdated. From 2018 until present, the Romanian society has been challenged with internal problems and external ones as well. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russo-Ukrainian war have led to a shift in perception, and as such the 2018 Barometer cannot accurately reflect the reaction and the views of Romanian citizens regarding the new security problems.

One of the main issues regarding the development of security culture is represented by the citizens' lack of trust in the principal media sources and those of the state institutions, as civilians begin to adopt a conspirative attitude, perceiving the internal and external actions of the Romanian state and its allies with a somewhat, degree of paranoia and scepticism (Nistor, p. 100).

A study conducted between April and October 2020 shows that the population's satisfaction towards the actions taken by the state and the support towards the government has significantly lowered. The context of the analysed period was represented by the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania. In October 2020, 59.9% of the population showed dissatisfaction with the measures taken by the government and 42.2% of the population had no support for the government (Radu, 2021, pp. 134-135).

Regarding the international conflicts, such as the ones in Ukraine and Gaza, INSCOP conducted a study in December 2023. An important point is represented by the responsibility for the Ukrainian War – only 49.8% considered that Russia is to be blamed, while 28% considered that NATO, Ukraine or the United States of America were the ones guilty of aggression (INSCOP, 2023). The same study shows that only 50.5% of the interviewed Romanians would be willing to defend their country, while 11.8% affirmed that they would hide until the cessation of the conflict, 19.4% would emigrate and 5.6% declared that they would discharge a medical certificate attesting their incapacity and lack of abilities to participate in the defence of the country (Ib.). This aspect is problematic because defence is not provided only by the responsible structures and institutions, but, as national security, it is provided through the unity and total involvement of the Romanian citizens. The fact that 36.8% of the interviewed affirmed they would seek fraudulent means to be relieved of a constitutional duty is a major issue. As such, the lack of security culture and the lack of understanding with regard to individual roles could transform, in the future, into an issue of human resources. This fact is shown in the new recruitment wave of the National Defence Ministry. From the 5,093 positions for professional soldiers, only 40% have been occupied. Moreover, for the mentioned number of positions, only 6,448 candidates presented. From this pool, 24% were rejected for failing the physical aptitudes test and 18% were rejected for failing the psychological examination (*Elemente din analiza procesului de angajare în armată a soldaților profesioniști*, Ministerul Apărării Naționale, 2024).

It is to be remarked that, besides the low number of candidates, the quality of those present was unreliable. The issue of human resources in the field of defence is a topical problem that will deepen, in the near future, in terms of both quantity and quality. In this context, new measures for developing security culture and measures for modelling the population to achieve the necessary capacity for defence become imperatives of the Romanian state.

The perspective of citizens towards Romania's foreign policy represents another vulnerability generated by the lack of security culture. As such, a study conducted by INSCOP in May 2024, shows that 27.7% of those questioned affirmed that Romania's ascension to the European Union was, rather, a disadvantage. Another segment of 42.3% sustained the fact that the Romanian Members of the European Parliament should fight for equal rights between Romanian citizens and the rest of the European Union's citizens, through this affirmation implying the fact that there are inequalities among the citizens of the European Union, from the perspective of political representation (INSCOP, 2024).

Another problem is represented by the lack of public information about the attributes of the European Union. A major segment of 73% affirms that they are not informed regarding the activity of Romanian Members of the European Parliament, 72.3% lack information about the activities of the European Parliament, 74.1% lack information about the activity of the European Commission (Ib.).

Lack of public information allows for the popularisation and interiorisation of Euroscepticism and hostile propaganda meant to destabilize the relations between Romania and its allies, this phenomenon being generated, directly, by the lack of security culture.

### NATO PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES ON CIVILIAN PREPAREDNESS AND SECURITY CULTURE

In the North Atlantic Treaty, article 3 stands as a reference for the strategic resilience of the Alliance: *"In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack"* (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). As such, this principle shows the duties of NATO states to guarantee their own resilience against attacks and shocks, including, also, the preparedness of civilian population for such

events. Resilience, in this sense, refers to the individual and collective capacity of the states to deter any disruption or shocks. Collective resilience is built through the capacity for defence as well as through the preparation of civilian population. The role of civilian capacity is to ensure the stability and security of the measures and actions taken by the states to maintain the guarantees of the North Atlantic Treaty (Strategic Warfare Development Command, 2023).

After the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has raised the degree of cooperation between the political-military structures and the civil ones. At present, the Alliance is bound to the civilian means and their capacity to support the efficiency of military forces. For example, 90% of military transport for operations is maintained by the civilian commercial sector: 70% of the satellite communications used for defence belong to commercial operators; 95% of the Transatlantic internet traffic, which also includes military communications are offered by private-owned network services (Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence, 2018, pp. 2-3).

The private sector is a key element for civilian preparation for resilience, NATO thus building long-term partnerships between its institutions, the states and the private sector. As such, the member states are required to develop and consolidate relations with the private sector, to promote collaboration and to communicate the vulnerabilities and the societal risks, in their entirety (Ib., p. 6).

From the perspective of the Alliance, civilian preparedness begins at an individual level. Individual civilian preparedness consists in ensuring the capacity to act towards the consequences of an unfavourable event, of a critical situation or of a major crisis. The key means to ensure individual security are general knowledge, capacity to ensure survival and maintaining a line of communication with the main authorities (Ib., p. 7).

## CONCLUSIONS

Highlighting the strategic importance of civilian preparedness and security culture, these aspects are essential both nationally and collectively, contributing to the overall resilience. Romania has the necessary legal framework to implement measures that could enhance both the preparedness of its population and its security culture. However, in practice, these measures remain superficial, serving mostly an informational function without substantial impact. There are exposed

vulnerabilities caused by the public's lack of trust in the state, scepticism toward the measures adopted during crises, and the reactions of the citizens in relation to the benefits derived from Romania's foreign policy and its international commitments.

One acceptable solution is for the new National Defence Strategy to include among its national security objectives the assurance of resilience through civilian preparedness and the development of security culture. It should outline key action plans and create measures that, through a synergistic effect, would provide the civilian population with the necessary materials for preparedness, understanding, and awareness of their role within national security and territorial defence. Civilian preparedness and security culture can also be approached collectively within NATO by establishing a bridge between civilian institutions whose responsibilities are critical during crises or conflicts. Furthermore, a common platform for promoting security culture could be developed.

In the 21st century, security culture is becoming increasingly relevant, particularly in the face of hybrid actions carried out by hostile states and organizations. With the globalization of communication and public media, it can be achieved more easily, as media channels can be used to inform citizens and highlight the significance of these issues. From the population's perspective, the Romanian state must ensure the necessary demographic to secure the human resources for military resilience and territorial defence. The current quantitative and qualitative gaps, along with the lack of interest in national security and defence, are driven by a deeply low level of security culture. By fostering a deeper understanding of general security concepts, individual roles, and each citizen's obligations, the quality and quantity of the country's human resources could be significantly enhanced.

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