ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

ROMANIA'S ENERGY STRATEGY – THE BALANCE BETWEEN HARD POWER AND ENERGY DIPLOMACY –

Assistant Professor Andra-Ioana PÎNZARIU, PhD
"Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy, Sibiu
DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2025.1.09

Energy security is a fundamental element of a state's stability, especially for countries in Eastern Europe, where Russia has consolidated its influence through its energy resources. Romania, located in the Black Sea region, faces specific challenges arising from regional dependence on Russian gas and the associated geopolitical risks. In this context, the application of the smart power concept, developed by Joseph Nye, becomes essential for ensuring national energy security. Energy security is a key pillar of national stability, particularly in Eastern Europe, where reliance on external energy resources can be used as a geopolitical leverage.

Romania strengthens its energy security through a combination of hard power strategies (diversification of energy sources, expansion of nuclear capacity, investments in renewables) and energy diplomacy (strategic partnerships with Western states and integration into European energy networks). This article analyzes the measures implemented and the challenges faced, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to reduce energy vulnerabilities.

Keywords: energy security; smart power; energy diplomacy; energy independence; regional geopolitics;

INTRODUCTION

Energy security has become one of the main concerns of European states in the context of rising geopolitical tensions and the use of energy as a tool of political influence. In particular, Europe's dependence on natural gas imports from Russia has been a major vulnerability, strategically exploited by Moscow to exert influence in the region. In this context, Romania faces the challenge of protecting its energy independence, modernizing its infrastructure, and diversifying its supply sources.

The concept of *smart power*, theorized by Joseph Nye, provides a relevant analytical framework for Romania's energy strategies. It involves the simultaneous use of *hard power* (coercive power based on material resources and strategic capabilities) and *soft power* (influence based on attractiveness, cooperation, and international partnerships). Thus, Romania can strengthen its energy position through both economic and technological measures (developing domestic production capacities) and diplomatic strategies by forming alliances with Western states.

Europe's dependence on natural gas imports from Russia has been a major vulnerability, strategically exploited by Moscow to exert influence in the region.

The main objective of this article is to analyse, through a holistic approach and using qualitative research methods, the measures adopted by Romania to ensure its energy security and counteract Russia's influence in the Black Sea region.

ROMANIA'S ENERGY SECURITY – ELEMENTS OF HARD POWER

Romania, strategically located on the eastern border of the European Union and in the proximity of the Black Sea, faces significant challenges in ensuring energy security, especially in the context of the influence exercised by the Russian Federation in the region. Energy security, defined as *"modality of energy supply, at adequate and stable prices, through protected critical infrastructures, and helping to support the economic performance"* (*Strategia de dezvoltare*

a României în următorii 20 de ani/Romania's Development Strategy for the next 20 years, 2015), is an essential component of Romania's national security.

A study conducted by *"Carol I"* National Defence University highlights that *"Russia has become a threat to Romania's energy and economic security"* (Băhnăreanu, 2014). This influence is exerted through control over energy resources and transport infrastructure, as well as through the use of energy prices as a political pressure tool.

To counter these challenges, Romania has adopted a series of strategic measures aimed at improving energy security and reducing dependence on energy imports. According to *Strategia Energetică a României 2025-2035*, the key objectives include diversification of energy sources, increasing energy efficiency, and developing energy infrastructure (*Strategia Energetică a României 2025-2035, cu perspectiva anului 2050/Romania's Energy Strategy 2025-2035*, 2024).

Romania has adopted a series of strategic measures aimed at improving energy security and reducing dependence on energy imports. According to Strategia Energetică a României 2025-2035/Romania's Energy Strategy 2025-2035, the key objectives include diversification of energy sources, increasing energy efficiency, and developing energy infrastructure.

These measures focus on both strengthening domestic production capacities and integrating Romania into European energy networks, ensuring a stable and secure energy supply. However, investments in production capacities have been limited in recent decades. Meanwhile, Russia, through its energy companies and political influence, has exerted pressure on Black Sea region countries, using energy as a *hard power* instrument. Additionally, hybrid warfare actions have been identified, including cyberattacks on critical infrastructure and the use of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to influence political decisions in the energy sector. In this context, Romania aims to strengthen its energy security by diversifying its energy sources, thereby reducing dependency on imports and increasing energy autonomy. According to *Strategia Energetică a României 2025-2035*, one of the main objectives is *"diversification of energy supply sources and routes, through the involvement of all regional partners"* (*Strategia Energetică a României 2025-2035*, ib.).

One of the most important projects for achieving this objective is the exploitation of natural gas from the Black Sea, which represents a strategic opportunity for utilizing domestic resources and reducing dependency on gas imports. Romania has significant reserves in the Black Sea continental shelf, and their exploitation could bring major economic and geopolitical benefits.

According to *Planul Național Integrat în domeniul Energiei și Schimbărilor Climatice 2021-2030/National Integrated Plan in the Field of Energy and Climate Change 2021-2030*, the necessity of *"swift implementation of the legal framework necessary for final investment decisions in the exploitation of natural gas resources from the Black Sea area"* is emphasized (*Planul Național Integrat în domeniul Energiei și Schimbărilor Climatice 2021-2030*, 2020). In this regard, Romania has adopted essential legislative changes, such as the Offshore Law (https://www.enpg.ro/romanias-offshore-wind-potential-policy-pathways-for-sustainable-development/), to encourage investment in the exploration and exploitation of offshore deposits. Exploiting these resources could transform Romania into a regional energy supplier, ensuring both internal supply and the possibility of exporting gas to European markets. Estimates suggest that the Black Sea deposits could cover Romania's internal consumption for the coming decades and would significantly contribute to budget revenues through taxes and royalties imposed on investors. To facilitate the exploitation of the Black Sea gas resources, Romania has invested in natural gas transport infrastructure. A key project in this regard is the BRUA (Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary-Austria) pipeline, which will enable Romania to connect to European gas transport corridors, reducing dependency on imports from Russia and strengthening integration into the European Union's energy market (https://isc.gov.ro/Proiectul%20BRUA.html). In addition to BRUA, Romania is also exploring other alternative routes for transporting gas extracted from the Black Sea, considering the possibility of developing interconnections with Greece and Turkey, which would provide access to liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in the Mediterranean.

The BRUA (Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary-Austria) pipeline will enable Romania to connect to European gas transport corridors, reducing dependency on imports from Russia and strengthening integration into the European Union's energy market.

Alongside natural gas, Romania is investing in expanding nuclear and renewable energy production. In this context, we can mention Romania's Energy Strategy that outlines the construction of new nuclear reactors at Cernavodă and the development of small modular reactors (SMR) in partnership with the United States of America, also emphasizing the need to increase renewable energy production capacities, particularly wind and solar energy, in line with commitments made under the European Green Deal.

These initiatives not only reduce Romania's carbon footprint but also contribute to enhancing the resilience of the national energy system by diversifying the energy mix. Romania is determined to increase the percentage of renewable energy in total energy consumption, in compliance with the commitments made within the European Union. *Planul Național Integrat în domeniul Energiei și Schimbărilor Climatice 2021-2030/The National Integrated Plan in the Field of Energy and Climate Change 2021-2030* underlines, in this sense, the importance of developing new renewable energy capacities and integrating with other markets in the region. These actions demonstrate Romania's determination to diversify its energy sources and enhance its energy security through both *hard power* initiatives, aforementioned, and *soft power* strategies.

Planul Național Integrat în domeniul Energiei și Schimbărilor Climatice 2021-2030/ The National Integrated Plan in the Field of Energy and Climate Change 2021-2030 underlines the importance of developing new renewable energy capacities and integrating with other markets in the region. These actions demonstrate Romania's determination to diversify its energy sources and enhance its energy security through both hard power initiatives, aforementioned, and soft power strategies.

SOFT POWER – ENERGY DIPLOMACY AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

In parallel with the *hard power* measures, Romania has developed an energy diplomacy strategy aimed at strengthening its position on the European energy market and attracting strategic investments. These efforts are aimed at diversifying supply sources, attracting investment and integrating into regional and European energy networks.

One example is the strategic partnership with the United States of America, launched on 11 July 1997, *"during the visit to Bucharest of the US President"* (MAE, Romania-USA Strategic Partnership, 2024), which has evolved significantly in the energy sector. As part of this partnership, joint projects have been developed, such as the construction of reactors 3 and 4 in Cernavodă and the implementation of small modular reactors (SMR) in Doicești. These initiatives not only increase Romania's energy capacity but also strengthen bilateral relations with a strategic ally. Additionally, Romania is actively involved in the *Three Seas Initiative* (https://www.mae.ro/node/49437), a platform that promotes connectivity in energy, transport, and digitalization among countries in Central and Eastern Europe. This initiative facilitates the development of energy infrastructure and the diversification of supply sources, thus reducing dependence on external suppliers. According to an article in *Contributors.ro*, *"energy diplomacy has become a central pillar of the strategic partnership between Romania and the USA, including joint projects in the nuclear and natural gas sectors"* (Felea, 2018).

Furthermore, Romania is expanding its cooperation with other European states and international organizations to diversify its energy sources and strengthen its energy security. Romania enhances its energy security through strategic partnerships with Azerbaijan, aiming at diversifying natural gas supply sources and developing regional energy infrastructure. A notable example is the collaboration between Romgaz and the Azerbaijani company SOCAR, which signed a Memorandum of Understanding to explore the development opportunities of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in the Black Sea. This project, formerly known as AGRI (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector), involves the construction of an LNG terminal in Georgia, the transportation of LNG across the Black Sea, and a regasification station in Romania, thereby facilitating the transportation of gas from the Caspian region to Europe (MAE, Romania-Azerbaijan Strategic Partnership, 2024). Additionally, Romania and Azerbaijan are collaborating on the development of the Green Corridor, a project that involves the construction of a 1,100 km submarine cable to transport electricity produced by wind farms in Azerbaijan to Europe, through Georgia and Romania. This project aims to diversify energy sources and strengthen the European Union's energy security (Ib.).

Romania is expanding its cooperation with other European states and international organizations to diversify its energy sources and strengthen its energy security. Romania enhances its energy security through strategic partnerships with Azerbaijan, aiming at diversifying natural gas supply sources and developing regional energy infrastructure.

These diplomatic efforts and strategic partnerships reflect Romania's commitment to ensuring its energy security by integrating into regional and international networks, diversifying supply sources, and attracting investments in energy infrastructure.

COMBATING HYBRID THREATS AND SAFEGUARDING CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURES

In the current security environment, Romania faces complex hybrid threats targeting critical infrastructures, especially in the energy sector. Hybrid threats represent a combination of conventional and unconventional methods, including cyberattacks, disinformation, and sabotage, aimed at destabilizing the normal functioning of society

and undermining national security. According to a study published in the Romanian military journal *Gândirea militară românească/ Romanian Military Thinking*, the Black Sea region is particularly vulnerable to such threats due to the complexity and lack of a functional regional security architecture (Vevera, Georgescu, Cîrnu, 2022).

To counter these threats, Romania has implemented a series of measures aimed at strengthening the protection of critical infrastructures. A key aspect is the development of a robust legislative and institutional framework that allows for the identification and protection of these infrastructures. It requires an integrated approach that includes strategies, procedures, and programs for prevention, preparation, response, and recovery in the event of disasters and emergencies. Furthermore, Romania collaborates closely with international organizations and external partners to strengthen its defence capabilities against hybrid threats. An example in this regard is Romania's involvement in the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, established in Helsinki, which supports member states in developing effective strategies and policies to address these challenges (https://www.hybridcoe.fi/).

Romania has implemented a series of measures aimed at strengthening the protection of critical infrastructures. A key aspect is the development of a robust legislative and institutional framework that allows for the identification and protection of these infrastructures. It requires an integrated approach that includes strategies, procedures, and programs for prevention, preparation, response, and recovery in the event of disasters and emergencies.

Romania has adopted specific measures to enhance the resilience of the energy sector against hybrid threats. They include risk assessments, the implementation of advanced technological solutions for detecting and preventing cyberattacks, and the development of continuity plans in case of major incidents. Thus, combating hybrid threats and protecting critical infrastructures are strategic priorities for Romania. Through the development of an appropriate legislative framework, international collaboration, and the implementation of specific measures in vulnerable sectors, Romania strengthens its capacity to face these complex challenges and ensure national security.

CONCLUSIONS

Romania has implemented significant measures in relation to national security. However, in our opinion, it is necessary that protection mechanisms and cybersecurity legislation should be continually strengthened. Moreover, the involvement in international initiatives and the development of innovative solutions, such as modular nuclear reactors, demonstrates the state's commitment to a sustainable and safe energy transition. Although Romania is making significant progress in securing its energy independence, there are still major challenges, such as external pressures on strategic decisions and the risk of corruption in the implementation of large energy projects. Adopting stricter transparency measures and strengthening collaborations with trusted partners will be essential in this regard.

Looking ahead, Romania should continue investing in the modernization of its energy infrastructure and intensifying its cooperation within the EU and NATO to maximize its energy security. Furthermore, the development of green technologies and the implementation of a coherent public education strategy on energy security can help reduce long-term vulnerabilities. The application of *smart power* will be key to Romania's success in ensuring energy stability and security in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

The application of smart power will be key to Romania's success in ensuring energy stability and security in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

In conclusion, strengthening energy security should be accompanied by sustained efforts in regional energy diplomacy. Romania should take on an active role in developing a more solid energy cooperation framework in Eastern Europe, thus contributing to the stability and security of the entire region. Through a strategic approach and the implementation of coherent policies, Romania can become a leading energy player at the European level.

ROMANIAN MILITARY THINKING

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Băhnăreanu, C. (2008). *Riscuri și amenințări în domeniul resurselor energetic strategice*. București: Universitatea Națională de Apărare "Carol I", https://cssas.unap.ro/ro/pdf_studii/riscuri_si_amenintari_in_domeniul_resurselor_energetice_strategice.pdf, retrieved on 6 February 2025.
2. Centrul de Prevenire a Conflictelor și Early Warning (2024). *Securitatea în regiunea extinsă a Mării Negre*, https://www.cpc-ew.ro/pdfs/securitatea_in_regiunea_mn.pdf, retrieved on 6 February 2025.
3. Dumitrescu, C. (2016). *Abordări de securitate internă ale României în contextul strategiei pentru securitate energetică a Uniunii Europene*. In the proceeding of the Scientific Conference *"New Challenges related to EU's Internal Security".* București: Academia de Poliție "Alexandru Ioan Cuza".
4. FAOLEX (n.d.). *Securitatea energetică și performanța economică*. UN Food and Agriculture Organization, https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/rom202403.pdf, retrieved on 6 February 2025.

5. Felea, C. (2018). *România este în plin "război de frontieră". În ce măsură conștientizăm?*, https://www.contributors.ro/romania-este-in-plin-razboi-de-frontiera-in-ce-masura-con%c8%99tientizam/, retrieved on 6 February 2025.
6. Institutul European din România (2024). *Orientări privind securitatea energetică a României*, https://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/publicatii/Studiul_2_-_Securitatea_energetica_RO.pdf, retrieved on 7 February 2025.
7. Institutul European din România (2024). *Rolul mecanismelor regionale de cooperare în contextual geopolitic actual*, https://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Studiul-SPOS-nr.-3_Mecanisme-regionale-de-cooperare_final.pdf, retrieved on 7 February 2025.
8. Ministerul Afacerilor Externe/Ministry of Foreign Affairs/MAE (2024). Parteneriatul Strategic între România şi Republica Azerbaidjan/ Romania-Azerbaijan Strategic Partnership, https://www.mae.ro/node/5322, retrieved on 6 February 2025.
9. MAE (2025). Parteneriatul strategic România-SUA/Romania-USA Strategic Partnership, https://www.mae.ro/node/4944, retrieved on 7 February 2025.
10. Ministerul Energiei/Ministry of Energy (2024). *Strategia Energetică a României 2025-2035, cu perspectiva anului 2050/ Romania's Energy Strategy 2025-2035*, https://energie.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Strategia_Energetica_vf_rev_1206-1-1.pdf, retrieved on 6 February 2025.
11. Păcuraru, C.G. (2018). *România – Energie și Geopolitică*. București: Editura Top Form.
12. Păcuraru, C.G. (2023). *Conflicte înghețate și componenta hibridă a războiului energetic al Rusiei*, https://www.contributors.ro/conflicte-inghetate-si-componenta-hibrida-a-razboiului-energetic-al-rusiei/, retrieved on 7 February 2025.
13. *Planul Național Integrat în domeniul Energiei și Schimbărilor Climatice 2021-2030/National Integrated Plan in the Field of Energy and Climate Change 2021-2030* (2020), https://energie.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Anexa-HG-PNIESC.pdf, retrieved on 8 February 2025.
14. *Strategia de dezvoltare a României în următorii 20 de ani/Romania's Development Strategy for the next 20 years* (2015), https://old.biblacad.ro/publicatii_proprii/2016/Maria%20Carmen%20Nadia%20PETRE_Strategia%20AR_ppt_Conferinta%20ABR_2016.pdf, retrieved on 7 February 2025.
15. Vevera, A.V., Georgescu, Al, Cîrnu, C.E. (2022). *Abordarea amenințărilor hibride din regiunea Mării Negre din perspectiva cadrului de protecție a infrastructurilor critice*, in *Gândirea militară românească*, pp. 62-79.

16. https://isc.gov.ro/Proiectul%20BRUA.html, retrieved on 6 February 2025.
17. https://www.enpg.ro/romanias-offshore-wind-potential-policy-pathways-for-sustainable-development/, retrieved on 6 February 2025.
18. https://www.hybridcoe.fi/, retrieved on 6 February 2025.
19. https://www.mae.ro/node/49437, retrieved on 7 February 2025.