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FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTIONS REGARDING SECURITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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The Republic of Moldova faces a series of security challenges that exert significant pressure on its stability and development. In a continuously changing regional and global context, these challenges represent not only concrete threats but also factors that can substantially influence the perception of security at both individual and collective levels. In this chapter, the author aims to analyze and closely examine these security challenges within the specific context of the Republic of Moldova and assess their impact on the perception of security among the population. The exploration covers various dimensions of these challenges, ranging from military and geopolitical threats to cyber, economic, and social risks, providing a comprehensive perspective on the complexity and seriousness of this phenomenon.

Keywords: *threat, factors, challenge, perception, risks, security.*

FACTORII DE INFLUENȚĂ A PERCEPȚIILOR PRIVIND SECURITATEA PENTRU REPUBLICA MOLDOVA

Republica Moldova se confruntă cu o serie de provocări de securitate care exercită o presiune semnificativă asupra stabilității și dezvoltării sale. Într-un context regional și global în continuă schimbare, aceste provocări reprezintă nu numai amenințări concrete, ci și factori care pot influența substanțial percepția securității atât la nivel individual, cât și la nivel colectiv. În acest capitol, autorul își propune să analizeze și să examineze îndeaproape aceste provocări de securitate în contextul specific al Republicii Moldova și să evalueze impactul acestora asupra percepției securității în rândul populației. Explorarea acoperă diferite dimensiuni ale acestor provocări, de la amenințări militare și geopolitice la riscuri cibernetice, economice și sociale, oferind o perspectivă cuprinzătoare asupra complexității și gravității acestui fenomen.

Cuvinte-cheie: *amenințare, factori, provocare, percepție, riscuri, securitate.*

Introduction

Security challenges represent various threats and dangers that put pressure on the stability and integrity of an entity, such as a state or a community. These challenges can originate from diverse sources and impact different aspects of security, including military threats, terrorism, organized crime, cybersecurity, climate change, and more. Additionally, poverty, inequality, pandemics, and nuclear threats are other significant sources of security challenges, with the potential to cause substantial harm to society and the economy.

Managing these security challenges often requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach, involving cooperation across different sectors and levels of governance, as well as collaboration between states and international organizations. Furthermore, the development and implementation of effective strategies for threat prevention and response, along with the promotion of cooperative security and dialogue, are essential for successfully addressing security challenges in a complex and interconnected global environment.

As the security landscape continues to evolve, it is crucial to adapt policies and security capacities continuously to address new threats and emerging challenges. Strengthening resilience and the adaptive capacity of society and institutions is also essential to ensure long-term security and stability in the face of ever-changing challenges.

Material and Method

Public perception of security threats is determined by the magnitude of the security threats identified by citizens, their psychological origins, the way these threats vary from a personal to a global level, and

the relationships between the perception of threats and other political attitudes and behaviors that shape perception [1, p. 149]. The origin of threat perception can be attributed to psychological factors and personal experiences. For instance, an individual who has lived in a conflict- or terrorism-affected area may have a heightened perception of security threats compared to someone who grew up in a more stable and peaceful environment.

It is important to understand that the perception of threats can vary from the personal to the global level. What may be perceived as a major threat by an individual or community could be considered less relevant or important by someone else. Additionally, media and digital communication can play a crucial role in shaping and amplifying certain perceptions of security threats. The relationships between threat perception and other political attitudes and behaviors are also essential in the process of shaping public perception. For example, a heightened perception of security threats may fuel demands for stricter policies or stronger government actions in the field of national security. At the same time, certain political attitudes can influence how specific threats are perceived and communicated to the public.

Sanda Sandu, a security and good governance policy expert, explains in an analytical note that the Republic of Moldova faces multiple security challenges influenced by its geopolitical position, recent history, and regional dynamics. Moldova is dealing with significant internal challenges that impact its security. These include endemic corruption, weak state institutions, and economic challenges. Corruption undermines the rule of law and citizens' trust in the government, while weak institutions can hinder the effectiveness of responses to security threats. Economic challenges, such as poverty and unemployment, can lead to social instability and be exploited by external actors.

Externally, Moldova faces pressure from the Russian Federation, particularly regarding the frozen conflict in Transnistria. This unresolved conflict represents a constant source of instability and a leverage point for Russia. Additionally, geopolitical tensions in the region, including Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, have reshaped the European security environment and increased concerns about security along NATO's and the European Union's eastern borders [2, p. 2].

Results and Discussion

Security challenges in the Republic of Moldova have evolved significantly in recent decades, and institutions and the legal framework have had to adapt to new threats. The conceptual framework of national security has been outlined at the international level within a global context characterized by geopolitical and technological changes. In the Republic of Moldova, the regulation of the national security sector has undergone developments to address new threats and challenges. Explaining the current context of security challenges, including from the perception perspective, requires a series of general clarifications from a legal standpoint, which, over the past 30 years, has also been influenced by political components. Thus, after gaining independence in 1991, the Republic of Moldova began to develop its own legal framework in the field of security. In the study „Legislation of the Republic of Moldova on National Security and Defense", in Chapter II, author Iurie Pantea mentions a series of legal acts and documents that allow outlining a general image of security policy, including national interests and threats [3, p. 10]. During this period, the country faced major challenges related to internal security, including ethnic conflicts and separatism in the Transnistria region.

In 1992, the Republic of Moldova adopted the Law on the Defense of the Republic of Moldova, which established the legal basis for organizing and operating the armed forces, as well as the Law on State Security in 1995 [4]. Also in that year, the Military Strategy/Military Doctrine was adopted. In the following decade, Moldova continued to face internal instability and external threats, as well as issues related to economic and social security. Several laws and regulations were adopted to strengthen the legal framework in the field of security, including the establishment of the Intelligence and Security Service in 1995 and the adoption of the Law on Intelligence Services in 1996.

Between 2000 and 2010, the Republic of Moldova sought to align itself with Western standards and practices in the field of security. Reforms were undertaken within the security sector to strengthen institutions and ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law. Several laws and strategies were adopted in

the field of security, including the National Security Concept adopted in 2004 and the Law on Information Security adopted in 2008.

The period between 2010 and 2020 saw new security challenges for the Republic of Moldova, including cyber risks, corruption, and external influences. Efforts were made to strengthen security capabilities and align with Euro-Atlantic security standards. Cooperation agreements and partnerships were signed with international organizations and partner states in the field of security. Ongoing reforms in the security sector resulted in the adoption of several laws and regulations, including those related to cybersecurity and counterterrorism. In 2011, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova approved the National Security Strategy. The document proposed a comprehensive approach to national security, considering multiple threats and challenges, thus setting objectives and priorities for the country's territorial integrity, the consolidation of economic and social security, the assurance of internal political stability, and the promotion of regional and international cooperation in the field of security.

At the same time, in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, the legal framework was significantly influenced by regional changes and the dynamics of the neighboring conflict. As such, concerns about territorial security increased, especially after Russia's annexation of Crimea, raising fears regarding the territorial security of the Republic of Moldova. Additionally, the trends toward reaffirming the Euro-Atlantic orientation strengthened Moldova's ties with the West and brought the country closer to Euro-Atlantic structures, as well as the European Union, which increased the alignment of the legal framework and the adoption of Western standards and practices by relevant institutions. The most important document adopted during this period was the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova, approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova in December 2023. It identifies two major types of challenges to Moldova's national security. External challenges include Transnistria, the risk of external interference, transnational crime, cyber vulnerabilities, and internal challenges determined by corruption, inefficiency of state institutions, poverty, migration, and political polarization [5].

The Impact of the Enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic Space on Russia-West Relations

The expansion of the Euro-Atlantic space has had a profound impact on the relations between Russia and the West, with Moscow perceiving this process as a continuation of Cold War-era practices. Russia often views the objectives of such actions as a direct challenge to its sphere of influence, emphasizing its strategic interests. Although dialogue mechanisms exist between NATO and Russia, this perception persists, allowing leaders from post-Soviet independent states to engage in maneuvers between Moscow and the West to maintain power, similar to tactics previously employed in Romania's internal policies. This situation underscores the fragility of democracy in these countries and their dependence on Moscow, often at the expense of Western democratic values.

In the context of a fragile democracy and unresolved dependence on Russia, the military, political, and social security of these states, including the Republic of Moldova, depend heavily on the evolution of relations with Moscow. By applying the security models developed by Barry Buzan, three categories of risks and threats to regional security are identified, with significant implications for Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine. This perspective, presented in the work *,,Risks and Threats to Romania's Security. Current Issues and Perspectives”* by authors Dolghi, Sarcinschii, and Dinu, divides security challenges into three groups: non-military risks and threats, military threats, and asymmetric and transnational threats [6, p. 23-24].

Non-Military Risks and Threats in Moldova

The Republic of Moldova faces a series of non-military risks and threats that could undermine its stability and security. The delayed resolution of territorial issues, such as the unresolved Transnistrian conflict, could exacerbate tensions and create additional dangers to the country's territorial integrity and national cohesion. Failure to uphold international commitments, such as agreements with the European Union or neighboring states, could destabilize the regional situation and intensify geopolitical tensions in the area. Negative inter-state developments, especially with neighbors like Ukraine or Romania, have the potential to escalate into destabilizing actions, fueling fears about national security and causing internal political and

social disturbances. Additionally, threats related to organized crime, arms, drug, and human trafficking, corruption, and social disorder are exploited by hostile forces to influence and destabilize the region, endangering Moldova's stability and development. Addressing these risks requires coordinated efforts at the national level and regional cooperation to counteract threats and promote stability and prosperity.

Military Risks and Threats

Regarding military risks, Moldova's security and stability are affected by the presence of approximately 2,000 soldiers and 40,000 tons of military equipment and ammunition from the former 14th Army in the region, which constitutes a destabilizing factor, given the unclear international status of these forces. Despite claiming to be peacekeeping forces, concerns about their impartiality persist. Furthermore, local armed confrontations are encouraged by the existence of separatist forces in Transnistria, ready to use military means to prevent the "reunification" of Moldovan territory. These military threats increase regional tensions and the risk of conflict, necessitating diplomatic approaches and effective security strategies to protect Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Asymmetric and Transnational Threats

In terms of asymmetric and transnational threats, Moldova faces risks arising from the structure of its population, including separatist tendencies in the Transnistrian region and aspirations for autonomy within the Gagauz community. These tensions could lead to an extremely dangerous situation, with the potential to revive nationalist forces and inflame the region. Moreover, the region faces the risk of destabilization through terrorist actions aimed at undermining trust in local and international security actors, such as the OSCE. These asymmetric and transnational threats present complex challenges for Moldova, requiring cooperation and effective approaches to counteract these risks and promote regional stability and security.

Neutrality and National Security

The permanent neutrality status of the Republic of Moldova is another crucial element influencing its national security. Although neutrality was conceived as a protective measure, it generates challenges in the face of new threats and vulnerabilities. Neutrality can limit the country's options regarding security and defense alliances, necessitating a reevaluation in light of contemporary threats [7].

Key Security Threats to Moldova

To explain causal relationships or correlations regarding security perceptions in Moldova in relation to specific events or phenomena, the following key threats should be addressed:

1. **Transnistrian Conflict**: This represents a real threat not only militarily but also politically, economically, and socially;
2. **Corruption and the Shadow Economy**: These phenomena undermine the country's economic potential and erode the sovereignty of the rule of law;
3. **Economic Risks from External Influence**: External pressures affect societal and individual security in sectors such as energy, food, ecology, demographics, and information;
4. **Aggressive Policy of the Russian Federation**: This poses a direct threat to Moldova's national security, jeopardizing its sovereignty and independence;
5. **Internal Vulnerabilities**: These include political and civic forces controlled or financed by the Russian Federation, local oligarchs, the weakness of the rule of law, the persistent vulnerability of the Transnistrian region, the fragility of the financial-banking system, and the lack of a security culture within society and the political class.

Through careful analysis of the main threats and vulnerabilities identified in Moldova, a complex and interconnected national security landscape emerges. The unresolved Transnistrian conflict, with its military, political, economic, and social implications, is a major source of instability and tension in the region. Corruption and the shadow economy undermine the country's economic and legal foundation, exerting pressure on the sovereignty and integrity of the state. Economic risks from external influence present varied and

interdependent threats across several sectors, affecting both societal and individual security. The aggressive policy of the Russian Federation, manifested through direct interventions and support for hostile forces, constitutes an immediate threat to Moldova's sovereignty and independence.

Factors Influencing the Perception of Security in Moldova

In the continuation of this scientific endeavor, the factors that influence the perception of security are identified within a specific context and environment. To provide a general perspective on the influential factors, they can be grouped according to various criteria, and the general domains can be outlined and explained as follows: the geopolitical environment, economic resources, history and past experiences, mass media and communication, culture and national identity, security institutions, technological evolution, and climate and environmental changes. The description of the factors influencing the perception of security, both in general and specifically related to Moldova's current context, is complex and includes a variety of elements that can impact citizens' sense of security.

Key Factors Influencing the Perception of Security

The factors that affect the perception of security are variable and can include both objective and subjective aspects, depending on the criteria used. Below are some of the most relevant factors, which are connected to complex domains:

1. **Political Factors:**

Political stability, national security legislation, and security policies can significantly influence how security is perceived in a country. In Moldova, the political landscape, including factors like political fragmentation and external pressure, can shape how citizens perceive both internal and external threats to their security.

2. **Social Factors**:

Social cohesion, crime rates, and a sense of belonging to a community contribute to feelings of security or insecurity. In Moldova, challenges such as social division, migration, and uneven development can contribute to insecurity, as individuals may feel disconnected from their society or from their national identity.

3. **Economic Factors**:

The standard of living, access to resources, and economic stability are essential for perceived security. Economic instability, inflation, and unemployment in Moldova may affect how citizens perceive their individual and national security, as financial instability often correlates with increased vulnerability to external and internal threats.

4. **Military Factors**:

The presence of military forces and a nation's defense policy can affect perceptions of both internal and external security. In Moldova, the unresolved conflict in Transnistria and the presence of Russian military forces create concerns regarding the country's military security and its ability to defend its sovereignty, influencing the population's perception of security.

5. **Cultural Factors**:

Values, norms, and cultural beliefs shape how individuals perceive security. Moldova's complex cultural identity, influenced by Romanian, Russian, and other cultural elements, can lead to differing perceptions of security among various ethnic or linguistic groups. The national identity in Moldova is often challenged by these cultural divides, which may weaken the collective sense of security.

6. **Environmental Factors**:

Natural or man-made threats, such as natural disasters or pollution, can impact security perceptions. Moldova's vulnerability to climate change, along with its dependence on neighboring countries for energy and resources, influences its sense of security. Environmental factors, such as water scarcity or soil degradation, also contribute to the country's broader sense of vulnerability.

Interactions Between Factors and the Perception of Security

These factors can interact with each other and have a cumulative impact on how security is perceived within a given environment. For example, political instability may exacerbate economic hardships, which,

in turn, could lead to higher crime rates or social unrest. Conversely, a strong sense of national identity and cultural cohesion can buffer the negative effects of economic or military insecurity.

In Moldova, the combination of historical experiences, political and economic instability, and external pressures, such as Russia's geopolitical ambitions, creates a complex security environment. Corruption, as an endemic issue, has significantly undermined the credibility of governmental institutions and weakened the public's trust in state security mechanisms. This lack of trust further discourages political will and hinders the effectiveness of efforts to improve the security situation. The deep-rooted corruption in Moldova discredits even the best efforts to strengthen the nation's security, contributing to a broader sense of insecurity among the population [8, p. 3].

Subjectivity of Security Perception

It is important to note that the perception of security is inherently subjective and can vary significantly from one individual to another, depending on personal experiences, social and economic status, and the specific context in which they live. In the case of Moldova, individuals' perceptions of security are influenced by factors such as ethnic background, geographical location (especially proximity to the Transnistrian conflict zone), and economic well-being. Therefore, understanding the diverse perspectives on security within Moldova requires considering both the objective conditions of the country's security environment and the subjective experiences of its people.

In conclusion, the factors influencing security perceptions in Moldova are multifaceted, and addressing these requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account political, social, economic, military, cultural, and environmental dimensions. These factors are interrelated, creating a dynamic and complex security landscape that must be navigated carefully to ensure the country's long-term stability and sovereignty.

Conclusions

In order to fully understand the security perceptions and challenges faced by the Republic of Moldova, it is essential to explore and assess in detail the threats and vulnerabilities, as well as the causal relationships and correlations between these and relevant events or phenomena. This contextual analysis, presented in paragraph one of Chapter II of this work, provides a necessary foundation for the development and implementation of effective national security policies and strategies.

The perception of security in the Republic of Moldova is the result of a complex and dynamic interaction between political, economic, social, military, cultural, and environmental factors. Both internal and external factors deeply influence how citizens form and adjust their sense of security. Studies and analyses suggest that the perception of security is shaped by both individual and collective experiences of citizens, as well as the ability of state institutions to manage and effectively communicate security policies. Trust in public institutions, especially law enforcement and the judicial system, is crucial for building a sense of safety. Moreover, the influence of mass media and the level of education on security matters play a key role in shaping public perceptions.

Therefore, to improve the perception of security in the Republic of Moldova, an integrated approach is needed, including political and institutional reforms, anti-corruption measures, sustainable economic strategies, and initiatives to strengthen social cohesion. Additionally, reinforcing international partnerships and European integration can provide a stable framework and support for the implementation of these measures. Only through effective and coordinated management of these factors can the Republic of Moldova aspire to a robust national security and a widespread sense of safety among its population.

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