INFORMATION SECURITY OF REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIA – WEST CONTRADICTIONS

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Abstract

Among a multitude of problems on security, in the context of the process of modernization and state building in the Republic of Moldova, in order to achieve a functional state structure and a society compatible with the EU states members, the Moldovan state faces challenges regarding cyber and information security. The globalization process, as context, enforces these challenges. Such phenomenon as hybrid war, meaning a kind of confrontation based mostly, or first of all on the use of information (or disinformation) has to be studied in Communication Sciences. In the current historical period, the globalization process (meaning the proliferation of modern technologies as well as the content of liberal democracy values and principles) has an impact on global politics: on the reconfiguration of the world order. In the context of the topical hybrid war, specialists in Communication can and should have the knowledge and skills to cover also the field of Security Studies. This will be a certain advantage for them on the national and international labor markets.

Keywords: *Information Security, Hybrid War, Resilience, Cyber Security, Republic of Moldova.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Among a plenty of security problems for the Republic of Moldova, trying to conduct a process of modernization and state building, in order to achieve a functional state structure, a functional market economy and a free society, compatible with the EU states members, the Moldovan state faces challenges regarding *information (and cyber) security*. The globalization process, as context, enforces these challenges. The phenomenon known as *hybrid war* means a kind of confrontation based mostly, or first of all, on the use of information (e.g. disinformation), which represents an information warfare. But the *information* (and *cyber*) sectors are just two of the components of the hybrid war, becoming prominent after the emergence of the Internet

era. The others, classical ones, are: the *economic*, *political*, *societal*, *environmental* and *military* sectors (BUZAN, 2014).

In the current historical period, the globalization process means a proliferation of modern technologies (tools, gadgets, infrastructure) as well as a proliferation of an ideological content (in West: the promotion of liberal democracy values and principles; in Russia, China: the promotion of other political values). This process has an impact on global politics: on the reconfiguration of the world order (KISSINGER, 2015). The contradictions, the competition and even the confrontation between world centers of power become more evident, especially between Russia and the West, in the context of Ukraine crisis (BERCA, 2014). Small countries, such as Moldova, can be a battleground and a victim of, in this confrontation between big geopolitical global and regional actors.

An important subject which characterizes the contemporary world is the *hybrid war* (FEODOROV, 2016). This is the concept which determines the framework of the theme of the present article. The notion of hybrid war has to be studied not only in military academies, but also in civil higher education institutions, because it affects all the sectors of a contemporary state: economy, environment, information, politics, society (inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations) and others.

In the context of the topical *hybrid war*, specialists in Communication can and should have the knowledge and skills to cover both the Communication Sciences and the Security Studies fields. The security aspects have to be studded by the students at the faculties of Communication Sciences. There is an interesting

phenomenon of convergence of the two scientific fields. This will be a certain advantage for them on the national, regional and international labor markets.

2. THE INFORMATION SECURITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

1. Media pluralism and the concentration of ownership in Moldova

There are a few challenges for Moldova's media in order to assure the pluralism of opinions in the country. The main one is the increasing concentration of the politically-affiliated ownership of Moldova's media. This raises the concern both for the independence of the press, for its capacity to be *the forth power* in the state and for the democracy as such. The EU and the USA have encouraged Moldova to implement the democracy and the free market. Yet, over 80 percent of the television market is owned by leaders of political parties or by persons affiliated with them.

Several recommendations can be offered in this regard. Moldova's media market needs deep reforms that would ensure media freedom and pluralism in society. This can be done by the liberalization of the advertising market that is monopolized and controlled by the leaders of political parties or by politically-affiliated (with the same political leaders) persons. The goal would be to remove media funding through advertising, from under the political control. That would permit to support, by the economic agents, the free and independent media. Another aspect is the support of the society to free media. This is possible by increasing the *media culture* of the society.

Republic of Moldova is a post-Soviet state, facing many challenges on its path to democracy. One of the problems is the lack of respect for the democratic practices, such as the division of branches of the power in the state. Not only the judicial power is suspected to be subordinated to political actors, but also the media, as *the fourth power* in the state. The increasing consolidation of Moldova's media in ownership of politicians in power or of persons affiliated with political

parties raises big concern for the democratic development of the country, the integrity of the country's democratic institutions, the independence of the press and the pluralism in society. The international community, especially the United States of America and the European Union, has encouraged Moldova's authorities to create the necessary conditions for the media normal activity, such as the access to information of public interest from the state institutions or about state men, which would force the politicians or officials to avoid corruption and embezzlement.

A few reforms are necessary in order to engage meaningfully the state structures and all citizens to improve the media situation, in order to ensure the media freedom and the pluralism in society. The main challenges for Moldova's media and pluralism of opinions in the country mean to stop the concentration of Moldova's media into the hands (ownership) of politicians in power or politically-affiliated persons, as the implications of this phenomenon are very negative for the Moldovan society and for democracy in Moldova. However, without a pressure on behalf of the European Union, the USA, the international institutions, real progresses in this field are impossible.

2. Media literacy and the challenge of fake news

Minority groups from Moldova consume information from Russian media. This is a challenge to the national security and the democratic development of the country. External sources are attractive to all Moldovan public, because of the fact that local media outlets cannot be financed at the same level. This leads to the opportunity to manipulate the popular opinion and undermine the cohesion of the multiethnic society – the society security. The lack of media literacy and critical thinking makes Moldova's audience vulnerable to manipulations, creating an opportunity for external propaganda to divide the society by geopolitical and ethnical criteria.

The propaganda of Russian media affects Moldova's media sector and the entire society, in the context of the hybrid war, countering the Western values, as well as the international norms, such as the *territorial integrity* and the *national sovereignty* of the states. Trying to reestablish its sphere of influence, Kremlin uses

hard power (as in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine or Transnistria – in 1992) and *soft power* – by its propaganda, compromising the Western style of life and promoting the Russian (conservative?) approach.

Being aware of the danger of Russian propaganda, the example of Baltic countries in facing similar informational challenges is very useful: for example, Estonia created broadcasting in Russian language – in order to counter Kremlin's propaganda.

3. Information resilience of Moldova's media sector

The problem of the information resilience of Moldova's media sector became a matter of national security. The information sector is one of the main spheres of the security field. At the same time, the development of resilience of the media sector is one of the main components of democracy building. Therefore, the resilience of Moldova's media sector is towards internal political actors that want to subordinate and control media resources and towards external instruments of propaganda, which can destabilize the situation in Moldova by supporting pro-separatist movements, parties that are opposite to the European integration into the liberal-democratic space of freedom, security and prosperity.

The experience of Ukraine and Georgia in the media sector is very useful for the development of *resilience* in the media domain from Moldova, taking into account that those two countries are more advanced. The Ukrainian and Georgian media sectors are more efficient in defending democracy, human rights, the rule of law and countering disinformation. Only a resilient media sector can accomplish such objectives. A few threats – polarization (East – West), rise of nationalist rhetoric in public space and others – are common and must be considered in the process of building resistance to domestic political control and disinformation.

The Moldovan civil society pays attention to information security as an important sector of security field. Being a post-Soviet, young state, the Republic of Moldova faces many internal vulnerabilities and external threats. In order to stabilize the internal situation, one of the vulnerabilities that Moldova has to eliminate is the constant attempt from the political actors to influence, subordinate and control the media sector. A sign of the fact that a sate became democratic is the presence of an independent media. In must build resilience in order to counter all attempts to subordinate it by diverse political actors.

One of the main threats that the Moldovan society faces is the internal and the external propaganda. Supporting the pro-separatist movement and the anti-Western political forces, the instruments of propaganda can destabilize Moldova. That is why the resilience of Moldova's media against the Russian Media resources is one of the conditions for Moldova's escaping from the Russian sphere of influence and of survival of the Moldovan state. Being a component of the hybrid war, the information warfare is a special theme researched by several Moldovan specialists and experts in Security Studies and it must be studied by specialists in Communication Studies as well. The Ukrainian and Georgian experience in this field is very useful for the Moldovan scientific researchers, because Ukraine and Georgia are more advanced in this field.

3. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN SECURITY AND DEFENSE FIELD: NEEDS AND PERSPECTIVES

The new paradigms of the 21st century conflicts call for new government approaches in order to face multiple problems of instability and uncertainty both at national and regional (international) levels (MAIOR, 2015). In the current security environment, states in general, and the armed forces in particular, are obliged to cope with tasks of deploying combat actions by using new technologies, systems and platforms of intelligent weapons, advanced sensors and digitization of the battle space – the space of confrontation. The informational strategic tool used to promote and defend national interests, in time of peace, in situations of crisis and during the armed conflict/war, gets a particular importance. The evolution of the events in recent years shows that we witness the emergence of a new kind of aggression, not military, a new type

of war, an invisible war with subtle manifestations and forms which are much more effective than the classical ones, called *hybrid war*.

The geopolitical actors, which pay much attention to communication, deploy a process meant to achieve a certain perception by the large public, in the contemporary security environment. Their strategic goal is to achieve credibility, legitimacy, and therefore discouragement and freedom action, vital to support the national strategy and to protect, to restore and to maintain the achievement of national objectives and permanent national interests.

Within the National Defense Strategy of the Republic of Moldova, it is mentioned: "the strategic communication will become the indispensable information element of the national authorities, representing one of the instruments that the state has at its disposal to achieve its objectives in the field of security and defense. In this direction, efforts will be directed towards developing an efficient strategic communication vision, towards the transformation of the institutional communication structures towards developing forms of collaboration and interaction. Thus, a common interpretation is required for the necessary strategic communication at the level of all public authorities and at the level of all policies and strategies" (LEX JUSTICE, 2018).

At the same time, we can not overlook the fact that in Moldova a Strategy for information and communication in the field of national defense and security (SICASN) was adopted in 2012, which established a national communication mechanism meant to inform the public about the reformation of the security sector and national policies in this regard. However, the completed studies in this regard note that the Strategy did not have the expected impact due to the lack of joint efforts of the institutions and partners in implementing the document, but also because of the inability to adapt the institutional communication to the new internal and external security developments.

More specifically, the Communication Strategy is no longer present after Russia's aggression in Ukraine (BERCA, 2014), which has changed the European security paradigm and deepened the informational wars, whose authors tend to manipulate the public opinion.

The actuality of the topic proposed for discussion is also determined by the fact that, given the impact of strategic communication, many professionals borrow this concept irresponsibly and create different definitions and roles for it, causing confusion. As a result, each public or government entity develops a strategic communication plan without any preliminary analysis or assessments. At the same time, the strategic communication becomes confused when perceived as a simple effort to achieve social or marketing communication.

Finally, within the academic environment and civil society, good communication is both a function and proof of good governance: in a democracy, informative and transparent communication is essential to maintaining a productive and lasting relationship between the executive, the legislative, the judiciary and the electorate. However, what does it mean strategic communication? Moreover, what place should it have in planning and implementing a national defense strategy?

There is a need for a common vision of strategic communication in the security and defense sector in the context of the current security environment. This means:

1. There should be identified the possibilities to ensure a common understanding of how to effectively implement the strategic communication process, not only involving the sources of transmission to the target audience, but rather the active engagement between the parties in a continuous process. This commitment action derives from the challenges of the current security environment security policies, strategic vision and national interest, operational needs and the need for a coordinated action plan.

2. There should be developed recommendations for the actors involved in the strategic communication process in the field of security and defense, taking into account that the strategic communication of the Republic of Moldova is seen as an inherent component of the national strategy and governance. In order to fulfill its role, the strategy is based on a well-structured process that reflects the Moldovan specificities and builds an effective and sustainable ("pathway") link between communication

objectives ("results") and communication capabilities ("means").

In this context, a few aspects should be taken into account:

a) the implications of the current security environment on how to communicate in the field of security and defense issues: academic approaches;

b) when is communication strategic? How to make it strategic?

c) what is the Strategic Communication for the Security and Defense Sector?

d) who needs to ensure strategic communication on security and defense?

e) which is the audience in the strategic communication process?

f) in crisis situations, is there also strategic communication?

g) how to communicate within the current security environment (institution to institution, institution to citizens, citizens to institution, etc.)?

h) how can we achieve an effective strategic communication?

i) why is it necessary to institutionalize the Strategic Communication?

The studies on the concept of Strategic Communication (Stratcom) should be focused on the efficiency from the perspective of practical solutions to counteract the threats in the current security environment (environment that has major implications for national security and for communication process in promoting national interests, and providing a security and defense sector capable of responding to these threats).

The results of the researches on Stratcom should contribute to:

1) identifying the need to ensure a common understanding on how to implement effectively the strategic communication process in the field of security and defense;

2) developing recommendations for potential actors in the strategic communication process and generally in the security and defense field.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The information security of the Republic of Moldova can be negatively affected in the context of Russia – West contradictions in the contemporary stage of world's development. Another very important threat to the national security of the Republic of Moldova is *the cyber* one. It represents a risk of a similar importance as the information aggression is. Cyber space became the battleground for interaction between power poles in the contemporary world. In fact, the notions of *cyber security* and *information security* are deeply, inextricably linked. The allegations about Russia's implication in presidential elections in the USA (2016), by hackers' attacks, showed that cyber security represents a vulnerability even for the advanced states – global geopolitical actors such as the US.

In the current global and regional geopolitical and security context, it is very important to pay more attention, within Communication Sciences, to *information security* of the European countries, especially to those from Eastern Europe – the former Soviet space (the so-called, by Russian authorities, *Near Abroad*). In the conditions of increasing contradictions between Russia and West, small states such as the Republic of Moldova became a confrontation field between the global/regional power centers. A small country like Moldova, placed at the border between the EU / the NATO and Russia (taking into account the real control of Russia in Transnistria), can be a victim in this war, if the Moldovan authorities do not take the necessary measures in order to protect the national security from this regard and to promote the national interests though Stratcom. East European countries became case studies on *information aggression* and other kind of struggles (in specialized on Security Studies literature, called *Hybrid War*) between regional/global actors. Within the information warfare (which is a component of a possible new Cold War) between Moscow and Washington/Brussels (the NATO, the EU), Moldova can be vulnerable.

All these aspects can be studied at some special courses in the Communication Sciences faculties. It is important to identify effective responses to all *information* (as well as to *cyber*) challenges, threats and risks.

The globalization process, as context for the contemporary world, in the current historical period of international development, enforces

these challenges through the Internet and High Tech (proliferation of a multitude of gadgets). Through the modern technologies, the globalization process makes it easier the proliferation of a massive content, increasingly disseminated, through the Internet. A characteristic of contemporary world is promoting specific values and principles: of liberal democracy (from West), of conservatism (from Russia), communism (from China) and other. This aspect has a crucial impact on global politics: on the reconfiguration of the world order. We can witness a revival of an ideological war between power centers. The *hybrid war* phenomenon, which means a confrontation based on the use of information (in fact: disinformation) covers also the ideological wars in the world.

The current historical period is characterized by the transition from unipolar to multipolar world order. In the context of the topical *hybrid war* – of confrontation between power centers in all sectors – specialists in *Communication* can and should have knowledge and skills in covering also the field of *Security Studies*. This will be a certain advantage for them on the national and international labor markets.

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