

## SECURITY ILLITERACY. THE SECURITY CULTURE PROBLEMATICQUE REFLECTED IN THE ROMANIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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**Abstract:** *This article sets to offer a comprehensive perspective on the continuous and flexible adapting of security and intelligence studies in Romania where, through notable efforts, there is an ongoing progress to integrate national practices into the Euro-Atlantic landscape. Even if we are not speaking of an innovative topic-as throughout time the efforts of theorists and practitioners focused on diverse theories and taxonomies related to security and intelligence studies- it has to be noted that our efforts have the purpose of rather consolidating and developing the subfields of education and security culture. From this perspective, we are perfectly aware that the process of identification, shaping, developing, and implementing of a security education and culture is undoubtedly laborious. For reasons concerned more or less with patriotism, education (in general), critical thinking, various interests, each of us has a security education, but the basis is only empirical. Starting from this reality, the objective of this article is to build a scientifically-based instrument that would export security education and culture to a scientific level. This article is based on pragmatic research methods, thus being more solution-oriented towards a sociological issue, namely the implementation of security education and culture at the societal level. More so, the analysis conducted is both descriptive- the establishment of the societal status-quo, and exploratory- constructing an argument for the application of security education and culture through various programs. The topic could be reviewed from the pragmatism paradigm point of view, more specifically through a deep analysis of cause-effect relations, as means for grasping the present-day context properly. This is the rationale supporting the aim of finding a valid solution to a pressing problem: the absence of a security education and culture at national level.*

**Keywords:** *security; security culture; intelligence; cooperation;*

### 1. INTRODUCTION. SECURITY CULTURE, AN OPERATIONALIZED CONCEPT

In a recent study published in *Gândirea militară românească* (Lesenciuc & Cozmanciuc, 2022:122-139), we were proposing a process of operationalization of the concept of security culture to be aligned with the National Defense Strategy Guidelines for the 2015-2019 period (SNAP, 2015:7): "The sum of values, norms, attitudes, and actions which determine the understanding and absorption of the security concept and its derived terms at the societal level", but, more important, with the constructivist school of thought within which the latest two National Defense Strategies were developed, and also the projective documents elaborated by the Department of Homeland Security in the US. More precisely, the term "security culture" was adapted so as to fit the patterns of national culture, in accordance with the dimensions proposed

by Professor Alexander Siedschlag (2018) of Penn State, Middletown, coordinator of various national security programs, being based also on the categorization developed by Peter Katzenstein (1996), professor at Cornell University, one of the most preeminent representatives of the constructivist school.

Following the operationalization process, a matrix scheme in accordance with a national cultural scheme (traditions, symbols, behavioral patterns, habits) was developed as a result of projecting norms and standards (norms, values, attitudes, actions). Making the connection between the theoretical landscape regarding the complex issue of the 'security culture' and the empirical reality has produced not only the matrix scheme recalled earlier, but also an operationalized definition of the concept, assuming the transitions from concepts to dimensions (information classes), variables (regarding properties and qualities of these variables), and indicators and indexes (about the measuring and comparing possibility):

Security culture represents a set of norms, values, attitudes and actions resulted from the habits, traditions, symbols and behavioral patterns of a nation conditioned itself by the need to adapt to the environment (including developing a threat response system), which ensures the understanding and absorbing the concept of 'security culture' and its derived concepts (including the security-freedom balance), reaching a minimum level of trust in state institutions and societal resilience as a result of social interactions and learning processes through formal, informal and non-formal education and based on a pre-existent civic culture (Lesenciuc & Cozmanniuc, 2022:136).

The process of operationalizing the concepts within the limits of the constructivist logic is instrumental to identifying the possibility of measuring the dimensions and variables of the security culture, for the purpose of later signaling certain possibilities of consolidation of the security culture. This article, part of a broader on-going research -aimed at identifying practical means of consolidating security culture during high school years through pedagogic experiment- has the purpose of identifying the current level of security culture in the sample groups and witness groups of four national collages, three civic and one military collage, located in different geographic zones.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**2.1. The general objective of the entire analytical approach. Research objectives.** The basic process of identifying an educational model for consolidating security culture requires a pedagogical experiment, thus projecting a pedagogical ascertaining-ameliorating research which targets the identification of practical tools for developing security culture during high school, and, extensively, also during middle-school. Aiming at bringing into discussion an ambitious and coherent project of security culture and education at the level of the civil society, our work focuses primarily on the curricular dimension of the project, meaning on identifying win-win solutions in the state-citizen dynamic in order to create and promote instruments: 'handbooks', programs, courses, even public policies on behalf of the state institutions which would allow for the creation of values, attitudes, citizens' behaviors in accordance with the institutional norms. Hence, this research does not intend to be conducted on the basis of a sample at the level of the entire high school cycle, but to rather build a consistent analytical landscape focusing on experimental and witness groups in order to underline the level of

security culture among Romanian high-school students.

Taking into account the need to promote security culture and education in the context of emerging challenges - which in turn came to reflect the national security vulnerabilities- and the fact that security culture and education are not part of the national curricula, our entire analytical process focuses on identifying practical solutions for consolidating security culture within the high school students by means of a thorough implementation of state programs (the general objective of the analytical of analytical process). In such case, regarding security as a common good which entails concentrating efforts at a multilevel scale of challenges/ threats to the national security, we set as primer objective to identify the level of security culture among high school students involved in the simple analytical process. In addition to such objective, we set to identify: the level of trust in public institutions of the population in question, to what extent this population is familiarized with the attributes of the institutions involved in the national security process, the risks, threats and vulnerabilities of national security, respectively the intention to get involved in finding solutions, the comparative analysis of the data concerning the level of security culture and resilience on behalf of the students enrolled in civil and military high schools.

**2.2. The research group.** The research universe includes student groups that are to be exposed to ameliorative program in the pedagogical experimenting phase and shadow /witness groups. Out of need to map the research universe, we opted out for a sample group of those analyzed from high schools in which the ameliorative project would be implemented. This sample group is composed of national military college students. Hence, we divided experimental structures of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students as follows: 11<sup>th</sup> grade class A of 'Tudor Vianu' National College in Bucharest, mathematics-informatics profile (19 students), 11<sup>th</sup> grade class A of the 'Andrei Şaguna' National College in Braşov, mathematics-informatics (29 students), and 11<sup>th</sup> grade class E of the 'Petru Rareş' National College in Piatra Neamţ, humanities and social sciences section (29 students). These three institutions are located in geographically-relevant area of Romania, and occupy important places in the national top of best academic results (for instance, in the previous academic year, the 'Tudor Vianu' National College occupied the 7<sup>th</sup> place, 'Andrei Şaguna' National College – 5<sup>th</sup> place, and 'Petru Rareş' National College in Piatra Neamţ – 44<sup>th</sup> place. The raking was decided after the

Baccalaureate exam out of 1.452 institutions in Romania, with a success rate of 99,4%-100%), being representative of the level of academic performance when implementing the pilot project.

Moreover, the sample group was composed of the homogenous group of the ‘Ștefan cel Mare’ National Military College Câmpulung Moldovenesc (raking 48 in the national hierarchy, with a success rate of 100%), mathematics-informatics section, with a total of 120 students in 11<sup>th</sup> grades. In order to balance the scale, in this phase we have integrated the 27 students of the shadow/witness group represented by 11<sup>th</sup> grade class B of the ‘Andrei Șaguna’ National College. Consequently, the population subjected to analysis comprised: 104 students of civil high schools in which the pilot project is implemented, and 120 students from the reference group of the military college above-mentioned.

Out of the subjects analyzed with an average age of 16.89 years old from the day the research had begun, 94 are boys and girls, the remaining 23 not identifying with a gender or to other indicators that would have not have kept their identity anonymous.

**2.3. Type of research.** This article has the purpose of underlining the partial results of a longitudinal study (designed in three phases: initial, experimental, and final), but also focuses on a transversal projection when cross-sectioned with a key characteristic: the level of security culture in a certain moment of the research, in the last week of the 1<sup>st</sup> semester in the 2021-2022 academic year. For this initial phase, we applied exhaustive quantitative research methods targeting the population which would later on be part of the pedagogical experiment, extended for analytical purposes along two levels of reference groups: shadow/witness group(s) in civil colleges, and the military one. Out of need for a limited-perspective instrument used to collect data, we opted for a mixed questionnaire of 35 open questions and multiple-choice ones, collectively administered in the presence of the professors involved in the pedagogical experiment, which also acted as field operators: Prof Dan Ciupercă (CNITV), Prof Rodica Deaconescu (CNAS), Prof Dorina Dexler (CNPR) and Prof Petrică Ciocan (CNMSM).

To research the level of security culture, we almost exclusively used the collected data from the targeted population, out of which we analyzed the relevant data allowing for the future secondary analyses. The majority of multiple-choice items implied the pre-codification of information and the possibility of using a Likert five-steps intensity scale, while for the opened questions, we resorted to post-codification of information.

### **3. RESULTS**

**3.1. The level of trust in state institutions.** It is not a surprise anymore that we are mainly living in a low trust society, especially when counting for civil high school students. Even if the average within the researched group is of 2,30 (equivalent of a trust level of circa 57,5%), the values and principles of the civil high school students vary between 1,82 – 2,00 (45,5 – 50% in relative values), fact that results in a consistent difference, of 19%, for the participating civil high schools: 1,87 (46,75%), compared to military high schools – 2,64 (66%). Ever since the first question whose responses were cross-sectioned with the intensity, there was a difference perceived between the trust level in state institutions among experimental groups and reference group that indicates, on one side, the vested interest in preparing in the civic domain/security culture in military high schools, having as a cause either curricula differences or the role of sub-unit commanders in shaping and consolidating this level or an increased rate of sensitiveness of the students about such topic. These aspects are easier to underline in relation to the frequency of certain responses: not a single civil high school student trusts state institutions “to a higher degree” whereas 15,83 of the military high school opted for this answer, not a single military high school student chose the “to a lesser degree” option, while this option was preferred by 4,80% of civil high school students.

The urge to justify the low level of trust in state institutions on behalf of civil high school students was a consistent one. Corruption within the state apparatus and the prevalence of personal interest above state interest ranked among the first places, with 20,65% of options, followed by the lack of transparency in the decision-making process, the incapacity (of disinterest) to promote a favorable image sustained by media campaigns, breaking the law and failing to promote human rights, the obsolete system and communist ideological roots of the current state apparatus, the instability of the policy-making process, lack of concern for citizens’ problems, and bureaucracy. Regarding the justification of the trust level in state institutions, only 8,33% of the military high school respondents identified negative aspects (resembling the ones enumerated above), whereas the majority chose to not comment on the matter (explicitly or implicitly).

Among the responses of the reference group of students, there are some which recall a sort of attachment to the “student of a military high school” label: “I activate in the Ministry of Defense hence I trust state institutions”, or to the “function” of citizen:

“That’s how a citizen of this country should think”. The students’ responses are not dissonant in relation to the vulnerabilities chapter of the National Defense Strategy (2020: 218-29), maintaining however corruption as the top choice among state system vulnerabilities (SNAP, 2015), and identifying convergent causes within the level of student preparedness in relation to the first six elements comprised by the strategic document. The aspects of the low level of cyber security, the pregnant technological deficit, but more important the low quality of the educational act, of security culture, and modernization gaps, the digitalization and development of infrastructures were not mentioned even if one student recalled “absence of digitalization of the state apparatus”.

To distinguish between the emotional and rational bases of trust in state institutions, and in order to correlate the degrees to which responses were motivated by attachment of disinterest, we collected data among the students on the perception of professionalism in state institutions. The results obtained were in accordance with those from the first question, but the average was lower- 2,13 (53,25 % in relative values), with an average point of 1,68 (42%) regarding civil high school students, and 2,56 (64%) regarding military high school students, with a difference of 22% in relation to the level of trust. If we are to correlate lack of trust with the absence of professionalism, we would discover minimal variations between the responses offered, with a single exception of a military high school student which responded that “he trusts state institutions”, but they are indeed characterized by unprofessionalism, his argument being “I can’t explain why”. The arguments sustaining the answers are similar to the precedents. However, it is worth mentioning that in this case the responses were more dissipated, and the first option of the civil high school students is incompetence resulted from “politicizing state institutions” (with 9,61% in relative values out of the total of respondents). Some subjects argued that the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic was dominated in media by the presence of politicians not health experts. Apart from incompetence, the civil high school students identified additional causes for the lack of professionalism in state institutions: nepotism, corruption, lack of interest, populism etc. The answers offered by military high school students, there have been arguments for the high value (organization, discipline and dedication), but also for the negative percentages which are in accordance with the responses given by civil high school students.

Regarding the politicization of state institutions, diminishing of professionalism, politics interfering with expert-based domains, we also questioned the trust level in the politicians. The results were eloquent: the students of the three civil high schools had an average of 0.63 (15,75% in relative value) whereas the students from a single military high school had more than double, 1.34 (33,5%), both values being situated near the “small extent indicator”. Such result contributes tremendously to our research: if the level of trust in public institutions (which are, from the students’ perspective, politicized) is one that fits the “to a certain extent” indicator, and the level of trust in politicians is situated near the “to a lesser extent” indicator (in the case of the experimental group, close to the value of “to a small extent”), this means that the political class, generally speaking, represents at the perceptive level an impediment to the scope of acknowledging the need for security culture.

Consequently, there is the risk of perceiving security culture not as an innate need resulted from the interaction between the state and its citizens, but as a condition imposed by the political class. From this perspective, the political dissidents must acknowledge that danger and design several coherent educational programs within the national security range that would not be associated with the political class. In other words, ‘security culture’ as a national project cannot be a political initiative in order not to employ a low trust capital, but it must be a citizen’s initiative or a security/educational experts initiative.

Overall, medium-level trust in state institutions and low level-trust in politicians, doubled by the performance criterion of the state apparatus (approximately, in relative values) inferior to the trust given are distorting the accurate perception of the security concept and its derived terms. The perception differences between civil and military high school students are the result of a subjective perspective after all, considering that score differences were not justified in any of the cases analyzed. We do not have the guarantee (by employing this indicator) that the security culture level is higher in the case of the military high school students, but we will not attempt to identify this aspect as we are more interested in the results registered within the population that is subjected to the pedagogical experiment.

**3.2. Institutions with competences in national security.** By trying to identify the institutions with national security competences from the point of view of high school students, we followed, by using the phrase “Which of following institutions have a more

important role for the national security of Romania”, the identification of institutions which are predominantly engaged in the national security process: “defense (understood in a double normative quality-national and collective defense), public order, intelligence activity, counterintelligence and security: (SNAp, 2015:5), in relation to the concept that the National Defense Strategy of 2015 introduced, that of “extensive national security”, which includes the “educational, health, economic, energetic, finance, environment, critical infrastructure domains” besides its core structure. From this point of view, the responses were nuanced in the sense that the difference between the security culture and extensive security culture concepts were less noticed in the case of civil high school students than in that of the military high school students. In the first case, within the response range, the differences between institutions involved in the narrow security concept-defense, public order, and intelligence are slim: Ministry of Defense – 75%, Ministry of the Interior – 72,12%, Intelligence Services – 71,15%, whereas the following institutions from the extensive system were allocated values ranging from half of the projection upon the narrow system: Ministry of Education – 34,62%, Ministry of Health – 26,92%, Ministry of Economy – 5,77%, Ministry of Environment – 4,81%, Ministry of Finance – 2,12%, Ministry of Energy – 5,77%, Ministry of Foreign Affairs – 1,92%. In the case of military high school students which are under the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Education jurisdiction, perceiving the role of the military is influenced by this relation-84,17%, whereas the other structures of the narrow security system are perceived as having an important role for national security as follows: Ministry of Interior-60%, Intelligence Services- 51,67%. The institutions included in the extensive security system are perceived in terms of below 10%: Ministry of Education – 10%, Ministry of Health – 9,17%, Ministry of Finance – 5%, Ministry of Environment – 2,50%, Ministry of Economy – 1,67% and Ministry of Energy – 0,83%.

Despite the fact that military high school students distinguish better between the structures with national security competences and the other broader system structures, their perspective is distorted by the very membership in such an institution, the army. On the other hand, the civil high school students have a less vivid picture (differentiated) of the two structures, but nonetheless, their perspective is not distorted by their affiliation with any of the national security institutions. All in all, we cannot conclude that the security culture level necessary in order to identify structures with national security competences is

altered regarding this indicator. Still, we ought to mention that there is not a connection with the current national security threats and vulnerabilities. The main topic debated during the period in which the questionnaire was employed was energy-related, but the security implications of the energy crisis were not taken into account even by the civil high school students (5,77%) or by the military high school students (0,83%). Consequently, a delay stemming from the aggregation of public opinions linked to national security aspects could be sensed, fact underscored by considering the role of the Ministry of Health when combating the COVID-19 pandemics (26,92%, respectively 9,17% from the respondents’ opinions).

Regarding the perception on the salary system within the national security system, the matter is actually reversed. Civil high school students think that the national security personnel are better remunerated than it should be, with an average of 2,13, while military high school students think quite the opposite- that the personnel are paid with less than they deserve, with an average of 1,77. Even if, compared with the majority of NATO and EU member states Romania’s national security employees are underpaid, the military high school students’ opinion is not necessarily an informed one, but rather a subjective one as they would hold the same positions in the future. The 9% difference in relative values regarding the two perspectives is supported by another difference: while none of the civil high school students consider that these employees are “severely” underpaid than they should be (value 0 in the Likert scale), 11 military high school students opted for such an answer.

The divergent opinions of the two groups of students are, regarding this indicator not easily identifiable. There is a probability that there is a subjective factor influencing the responses of the military high school students. There is also a similarity concerning the delay of the aggregation process of public opinions of the institutions with national security competences. Certainly speaking, the security culture level is not low in relation to the knowledge degree of the institutions involved in the extensive national security system.

**3.3. Identity perspective.** From an identity perspective, the questionnaire results were unpredictable. 8,65% of high school students have opted for multiple identities, and 90,38% for a single identity. Taking into account both options, on the first place of top choices for the civil high school students is the nation-state, with 40,48% of options (considering that CNPR students gave opted for local

identity). On the following places as an identity option are: the city: 33,65%, Europe: 22,12%, and the entire world: 11,54%, the region: 4,81%. The military high school students, assuming that a level of security culture was achieved through formal education, it would have been expected that national identity scores first, with a higher percentage than in the cases of military high school students. Still, local identity is situated on the first place with 55,83%, followed by national identity with half the score of the local identity: 24,17%, respectively by other potential identities, with values below 10%: regional-9,17%, European – 5,83%, and global – 5,00%. In the case of military high school students, there were only two options for a multi-layered identity, both assuming a triple identity: local, regional, and national.

Security culture is a concept that involves first and foremost national identity. Taking into account the results of the two groups, the experimental and referenced ones, it is safe to assume that from this perspective the level of security culture is a relatively low one, reality amplified by the lack of an awareness program of the security-related issues even in the case of military high schools.

Hypothetically speaking, the students' option for a city in which students, especially civil high school students would continue their studies as university attendees is tightly linked with their identity option. From this point of view, civil high school students, which had multiple choice options, formulated their intention of continuing their university education in Romania-42,31% (with the note that 65,51% of CNPR students have opted for this choice), then, in a European city-37,50%. The option of continuing their studies in their birth town (the majority of answers were from CNITV students) was embraced by only 8,56% in relative values, whereas continuing the studies in a city outside of Europe was picked by 7,69% of civil high school students. The military high school students on the other hand, considering that continuing their military studies is mandatory, and given the fact that in Suceava county (where CNMSM is located) there is no such possibility, 86,66% of students chose to continue their studies in another Romanian city, the rest of the values being therefore insignificant. Military high school students didn't have multiple-choice option; hence career prospects are precise and pre-established, and the chances for a rededication are slim. For the answers to question no. 11, which asks for clarifications for answer 10, military high school students used this very argument, stating their preference for one of the armed forces universities, Military Technical Academy or the Military Medicine Faculty.

Regarding the options of civil high school students, they crystallized in four main directions: low quality level of education in Romania and the high level of education in Europe/outside Europe (11,53%), lack of specialization in the residing/birth city (10,57%), multiple short- or long-term opportunities (9,61%), and the need for improving, knowing, and expanding the horizon (5,76%). Most of the alternative answers could not be justified.

After correlating the options of the questions which made the object of analysis in the context of the present sub-chapter, we concluded that there is no precise statistical determination regarding the identity dimension, and, consequently, analyzing from the career prospects perspective does not serve the desired research objectives. However, the identity option explicitly formulated indicates a low level of security culture, especially for the reference group.

**3.4. Knowing the risks, threats, and vulnerabilities to the national security.** In order to identify the level of knowledge of risks, vulnerabilities and threats to the national security, we tried to identify first the perception on Romania's development potential, and the chances for that potential to materialize on regional, European or global level, respectively knowing security guarantees concerning Romania. In the hypothesis of development to the point of becoming a regional actor of significance, we formulated the following request through the questionnaire: "For Romania to be considered a powerful state, it is first and foremost necessary for it to prove that it is an authority ...". Civil college students have opted for the economic development of Romania – 85,58%, followed by political development – 29,81, technological – 19,23%, military – 15,38%, and symbolic – 19,23%

Military high school students have opted for approximately the same priorities' order, with the exception that over 50% of them have considered essential the development in *hard power* terms. Influenced by their career choice, and their acquaintance with a certain professional environment- the military one-these students found necessary the development in the area of hard power, given that 90,47% of civil high school students and 84,62% of total respondents opted for the *soft power* answer. Therefore, from military high school students' point of view, the prospect for development is bipolar, like an economic power: 53,33% and military power – 50%, then as a political power: 33,33%, technological: 18,33%, and symbolic: 9,17%.

Military high school students' perspective is compatible with that of the National Defense Strategy

(2020), whose subtitle underlines the two dimensions: “Together, for a safe and prosperous Romania existing in a world full of novel challenges”, in which the word ‘safe’ entail the need of long-term military development (or coercive), and the term ‘prosperous’ could refer to the economic dimension. The civil high school students’ perspective implies that only one of the two dimensions would be taken into account, the economic one; the security culture level is medium in this instance. Arguing for the options (through the responses to question no.13) presumes arguments dissipation. In general, arguments on economic power also refer to targets (joining G20). Political power, on the other hand, is considered the link between and a control mechanism over the other power forms. One answer explained the superiority of symbolic power: the other forms of power do not matter is there is a lack of cultural identity of the nation-state. Regarding military power, there were only a few arguments. The ones who have opted for this power form either chose not to answer or claimed their answer “without any special reason”. In spite of this fact, there were responses that gathered the following perspectives: the power status of a nation is measured strictly by taking into account military capabilities, military power is a catalyst for the other types of power or the necessity to understand the geopolitical position of Romania as a “shield for Europe against the Russian danger”.

This perspective refers also to Romania’s geographic ambitions of becoming a recognized power. Regarding this challenge, “Romania has chances of being considered a powerful state in ...”, both civil and military high school students have divergent opinions, the majority of which being concerned with local geographical areas. In the case of civil high school students, their first option was mentioning developing as a powerful state actor in the Balkans – 28,85%, then in Eastern Europe – 25,96%, in the entire Europe – 16,35%, in the Extended Black Sea Region- 13,46%, in the entire world – 1,92%. (we mention that 20,19% of respondents were convinced that Romania cannot become a powerful state actor), and in the case of military high school students, the responses were as such: developing as a powerful actor in Europe – 25,83%, followed by Balkans –23,33%, Eastern Europe – 21,67%, the Extended Black Sea Region – 12,50%, and the world – 4,17% (only 10,83% respondents claimed that Romania has slim to no chances of becoming a strong state). In the “Preface” of the current National Defense Strategy, the ambition of fulfilling security objectives imply a certain type of engagement in relation with the

North-Atlantic and Black Sea region, while national security objectives are defined within the context provided by NATO and the EU, narrowed to the areas of “the Black Sea region, and the Balkans, as well as consolidating security and stability in other areas” (SNap, 2020:16). Due to the unclear position in relation to the Black Sea region, “a geographic area of crucial importance” (SNap, 2020:21) for Romania, civil high school students that would be subjected to the pedagogical experiment do not prove a high security culture level.

The following questions better clarify the security culture level, focusing on the possibility that an armed conflict might take place in Romania’s proximity, Romania’s involvement in such a conflict over a time span of five years, the potential aggressors endangering national security, and the resolution mechanisms of security issues. The questionnaire was submitted five weeks before the moment when Russian troops invaded Ukraine and in the context of latent of low intensity risk of escalation of the various geographical areas’ conflicts, especially those in the Black Sea Region: Donbas and Lugansk, Crimea, Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia etc. To the question “To what extent do you think it’s possible that a military conflict would take place in the area?”, despite response differences, civil as well as military high school students had responses close to value 1, ‘slim chances’, or 2 ‘to a certain extent’. The responses average was 1,43 (37,75% in relative values), civil high school students opting for an increased probability of a conflict outbreak – 1,68 (42%), whereas military high school students did not think such a scenario is probable – 1,20 (30%). From the total of respondents, 39 (17,33%) opted for the ‘slim chances’ response, 90 (40%) opted for the ‘to a certain extent’ response, and only 6 (2,66%) for the ‘high chances’ response. The answers were surprising in what concerns the involvement of Romania in a war in the upcoming 5 years, the values being higher than in the previous question. With an average of 1,60 (40% in relative values), higher by 2,25% than the possibility of a regional conflict, the students answered that Romania has chances of being involved in a military conflict. The average for civil high school students was 1,79 (44,75%), equivalent with the “to a certain extent” option, whereas the military high school students average was of 1,41 (35,25%), closer as a value to the ‘slim chances’ option. The answers to both questions argue for a lack of knowledge of the regional security environment, respectively a low level of security culture. An argument in this regards comes also from analyzing the motivation behind the possibility of a

conflict outbreak: 36 students (16%) claim that the involvement would be triggered by Russia's aggressive behavior, out of which 26 are civil students (25%), and 10- military high school students (8,33%), out of which only 16 (7,11%) , 10 civil and 6 military (5%) viewed the involvement after an escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war as a possibility, precisely as a result of a potential (at the time the questionnaire was completed) invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation 16 students (7,11%) viewed as a probable case the involvement of Romania in a conflict as an action deemed necessary by Art 5 of the North-Atlantic Charter, and 12 (5,33%) as a result of regional conflicts and the instability of the regional security environment.

To be able to identify the potential aggressor, we formulated the question no 21 "Which of the following states geographically close to Romania could manifest an aggressive behavior in the following 5 years?", and we included, besides immediate neighbors: Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, also Russia, China, and Turkey. The responses varied this time as well between civil high school students and military high school students mainly from a value-based point of view, not hierarchically speaking, all the more so as both student groups had placed Russian Federation threats to the top of the hierarchy- 82,69% of civil students, and 75,83% of military students. On the second place, both groups listed Hungary- 30,77% civil students and 40,83% military students, followed by China (16,35%, and 13,33%), Ukraine (14,42% and 11,67%). The answers concerning the aggressive intentions of the Republic of Moldova were surprising (9,62% and 4,17%).

Taking into account the offensive and aggressive behavior of the Russian Federation towards national security, and also this states' actions in our country's eastern proximity, but also not recognizing the obligations imposed by political and political-military alliances which a part from the before-mentioned countries take part in (see for instance Hungary), we consider that the level of security culture from this indicator's perspective is a medium one.

Although included in the previous interview body, for purposes of not suggesting certain responses, the aspect about security-related issues of Romania proves a high knowledge level on behalf of the respondents. To the question "Who can solve national security problems?", both civil and military high school students ranked first the following option: "On one hand, the Romanian state institutions, but also NATO/EU" with 44,23%, respectively 49,17% out of all options, followed by the answers: "Equally, NATO/EU"-32,69%, and

20,00%, and "First and foremost NATO and the EU but with a small contribution from the Romanian state" – 17,31%, and 17,35%. Marginal values did not benefit from consistent scores, rather, civil high school students did not consider that solving national security problems would depend exclusively on NATO and EU intervention.

In what concerns the different types of threats to national security, mentioned within the National Defense Strategy (2020), but present in the previous strategy as well (SNAP, 2015), civil and military high school students had similar responses. To the question of "Do you believe that Romania could become the target terrorist attacks in the next 5 years?", an unclear threat for both national defense strategies, a security risk with disastrous consequences, but with a low probability in our case, the average of responses was 1.00 (25%), meaning the level of 'slim chances', with small variations in what concerns the two student groups. To the question of "To what extent do you believe that illegal migration from the Middle East can negatively impact Romania in the next 5 years?", the average was 1,77 (44,25%, close to the 'to a certain extent' level could be interpreted as a sign that illegal migration may be associated not only with terrorism but also with human trafficking, dealing drugs, weapons etc.) The differences between the two categories of respondents are minor: 1,83% (45,75%) for civil high school students, 1,70% (42,5%) in the case of military high school students. A similar result was registered regarding the question of "To what extent do you believe that Romania will be the target of cyberattacks in the following 5 years?". From this perspective, considering that cyberattacks have become a major trend with the potential of influencing or even altering the security environment according to the National Defense Strategy (2020), cyber attacks

launched by state and non-state entities (cybercriminal groups, hackers with or without an ideological, political or extremist-terrorist motivation) on the intelligence and communication structures of crucial importance represents a serious threat to national security; their intensity, complexity and diversity being placed on an ongoing evolutive path (SNAP, 2020:25)

needed to be acknowledged, all the more so attempts at launching such attacks is being ascertained all the time, with a higher intensity in the aftermath of Russian invasion of Ukraine. The general score of 1,76 (44%), close to the "to a certain extent" value, with variations between 1,72 (43%) in the case of military high school students and 1,88 (47%) in the



case of civil high school students is an indicator of the low security culture level. Together with the previous results, the conclusions indicate a medium level of security culture from this perspective.

**3.5. Youth involvement in national security problems.** The activism of high school students is the most important indicator in what concerns the level of security culture. In this regard, we conducted a series of 7 questions through which we wanted to grasp students' intention of being active in national security problems, as a result of a minimum necessary level of security culture, compared to previous participation in civic actions. To the first question. "To what extent would you agree to have certain rights restricted through wiretapping, electronic mail checks etc. to increase national security?", initiated after an intense debate on the reports between security and liberty (see for i.e., the famous paper coordinated by Thierry Balzacq and Sergio Carrera, 2006, *Security Versus Freedom? A Challenge for Europe's Future* or the ones generated after 9/11 attacks, v. Dinh, 2001; Banks, 2010, etc.) or the reports between security and private life (having as a focus point thye debates around the Cambridge Analytica scandal and reference papers in the domain, v. Schnellbe *et al.*, 2018; Kozłowska, 2018, etc.). To this question, the averages obtained after the questionnaire was submitted were of 1, equivalent to 'slim chances', meaning 0,78 (19,5%) for civil high school students, and 1 (25%) for military high school students, with an average of 0,88 (22%). Similar results were registered through the responses to the question "To what extent you agree that personal information be used by various economic entities (banks, markets, corporations)?", with an average of 0,92 (23%), a value of 0,82 (20,5%) obtained after analyzing the questionnaire filled by civil high school students, and 0,98 (24,5%) for military high school students. The two questions, which followed one after another, can generate confusion in the students' minds without security culture. In the first case, that entail narrowing liberties and rights (actions which can be employed by the state anyway in special circumstances), the issue is viewed as in the second case that does not imply a solution to a national security problem. Rather, out of lack of attention, when using social media, people give up easily their personal information (such as location). The response to the third question underscores that, when security culture is missing students fail to distinguish within the security-liberty relation. Asked if they would agree that their personal information be collected by social media platforms (Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook etc.)

students responded in similar values to the previous questions: 1,04 (26%) general average, with 1,02 (25,5%) civil high school students, and 1,07 (26,75%) the average among military high school students. On this three-questions panel, through the responses given, students proved a low security culture level.

The following four questions researched students' activism (as an intention) in relation to the three major security dimensions: defense, public order, and intelligence, toppled by students' activism (as an anterior practice) in what concerns civic projects. "To what extent would agree to join the Romanian Army to respond to a security need?" is the question that proved the largest gap between civil and military high school students' responses. In the first instance, the low level of activism, with a value of 1,51 (37,75%) represents an alarming reality, especially because in the case of military high school students, activism is above 3 ('to a large extent') – 3,08 % (77%). The average between the two groups is irrelevant. The relevance is maintained only in the case of a 40 % gap, an indicator of the low level of security culture in the case of civil high school students and a high level – military high school students. From this perspective, we ought to conclude that in the case of the following indicators on the level of activism at an intentional level in relation to the support of the public order institutions: police, county police, Romanian General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations in the case of a catastrophe or in the case of supporting intelligence services, military high school students are willing to do it within the limits of the standard value 3 ('to a large extent') with averages of 2,97 (74,25%), and 3,10 (77,5%). The major change at the intentional level was produced in the case of civil high school students, for whom intervention to support public order and intelligence structures score values between 2 and 3 on the Likert scale, meaning between 'to a certain extent' and 'to a large extent' – 2,48 (62%), and 2,60 (65%). The failure to identify the three situations as being quasi-similar, answering to security problems handled by the three-core structure within the Romanian state security system represents the main element for understanding of a low level of security culture in what concerns civil high school students that are to be subjected to the ameliorative program. In the absence of some constraints generated by the lack of knowledge on aspects of national security, the two student groups have given similar scores for their activism so far (up to the moment of filling the questionnaire): 2,02 (50,5%) for civil high school students, and 2,16% (54%) in the case of military high school students.

Question no. 28 acts like a filter for the purpose of identifying the real level of involvement and honesty of both groups when completing the questionnaire.

**3.6. Other aspects.** In a similar manner, but for purposes of testing the openness and sensibility of the subjects to the information launched through mass media, we identified the main information sources of students. In accordance with our initial expectancy, there are no notable differences between the two student groups, and ranking first in their option, with 93,27%, respectively 86,67% is the Internet (also including social media). Books are found on a considerable distance in their top choices with 32,69% for civil high school students and 27,50% for military high school students, the TV – 25,96%, and 25%, and friend and acquaintances – 24,04%, and 18,33%. The classical media has an insignificant role in what concerns communication in the contemporary society, reason for which relying on the Internet entails decreased factual accuracy. To the question of “Do you believe that the information received are correct?”, acknowledging this risk is equally distributed among student groups – 2.02 (50,5%) for civil students, and 2.05 (51,25%) for military students, close to the ‘to a certain extent’ threshold.

Question no. 31, “To what extent do you believe the received information could manipulate you?” benefits from slightly different responses, but having the same threshold value, ‘to a certain extent’: 2,34 (58,5%) for civil high school students, and 1,98 (49,5%) for military high school students. The slightly increased trust in the possibility of resisting manipulation is not challenged necessarily by this resistance. This aspect is verified through the sufficient permeability in relation to one of the most circulated conspirative theories regarding a parallel Government which aims at creating a New World Order. The obtained values, although not significant are an indicator of the proneness to manipulation and, more importantly, an indicator of the lack of necessary level of security education and culture: 1,35 (33,75%) for civil high school students, and 1,41 (35,25%) for military high school students. Strictly related to this conspirative theory and the anti-vaccine rhetoric, in order to verify the resistance to manipulation and fake news, we verified students’ perspective towards anti-COVID-19 vaccination, both as an intention and factual reality. In civil high schools, the number of vaccinated students at the moment the questionnaire was submitted, in relative values was of 60,58%, and those unvaccinated but which were going to 19,23%. With a total of 79,18% vaccinated people or intending to vaccinate, the

relative value of the openness to vaccination for civil high school students was of approximately identical with the value registered by military high school students (65%-vaccinated and 14,17% aiming to, in total, 79,17% openness to vaccination). Therefore, regarding the request for a response related to a national security issue- vaccination in order to avoid the spread of the virus and to decrease the infection rate-, the subjects tended to react positively (despite a small delay) by 4/5. Even so, in relation to the question “To what extent do you consider that the low level of vaccination among the Romanian population is inflicted by the lack of security culture?”, the responses were different: 2,46 (61,5%), meaning ‘to a certain extent’ was the answer of civil high school students, and 2,09 (52,25%) – of military high school students. The results entail lack of problem-understanding skills, potentially caused by a lack of security culture, while this low level of understanding is motivated also by the short, blunt students’ reactions: “COVID-19 is real and it is used as a manipulation tool”, “COVID-19 is real, but was not created because of an accident”.

To sum up and trying to insert another filter, we questioned the subjects on the most pregnant security issue Romania is confronting with, without offering pre-defined responses. To this open question, if is previously, through the 34 questions there have been suggested certain security-related issues, we received a large array of responses touching upon various aspects from different domains. The differences in what concerns the answers given by civil high school students and military high school students were rather slim, with the exception of signaling the low technological level (by 10 respondents) and energetic insecurity (by 6 respondents) in the case of military high school students. There are nonetheless certain aspects deserving to be brought to light: the rate of nonresponses comes close to 25% (for civil high school students-23,08%), and the aspects with whom security-related issues gather more than 10% are only two out of 30: cyberattacks – 11,54%, lack of culture/low level of education – 10,58%. Another conclusion would be the one linked to the acknowledging of vulnerabilities – 61,33% of responses –, and threats – 14,66% (mostly cyberattacks and Russian aggressive behavior), also taking into account the 24% of students preferring to withhold an answer or couldn’t think of one. After ordering the deficits of the national security system, we could encounter: fake news, internal political instability, educational shortcomings, technological backwardness, low vaccination rates, economic instability, inactivity and poor army supplies, COVID-19 pandemic, energetic insecurity, security

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system, public order, and health system gaps, lack of professionalism in state institutions, the preeminence of extremist parties in Romanian Parliament, malicious protection of personal data, etc. The lack of coherence and the indecisiveness of respondents indicate that, although security-related aspects were touched upon, there is a low level of opinion aggregation about security-related issues, fact that implies a low level of security culture as well.

**4. CONCLUSIONS**

After cross-sectioning the information received with the pre-established objectives resulted from the operationalization scheme of the security culture concept, we reached the conclusion that, regarding almost each objective (with the exception of OS6-entailing comparative analysis), the level of security culture reached by the experimental and reference groups can be established as follows:

Table no 1 The estimated level of ‘security culture’

Objectives	Experimental group (civil high school students)	Reference group (military high school)
<b>OS1 trust level</b>	<2	<2
In institutions	2	2
In politicians	1	1
<b>OS2 being familiar to the institutions with national security competences</b>	2	2
<b>OS3 identity perspective</b>	<2	≈1
<b>OS4 knowing the risks, threats, and vulnerabilities to the national security</b>	2	2
Perceiving the development potential of Romania	2	3
perceiving the geopolitical landscape	2	2
perceiving the probability of regional conflicts	1	1
perceiving potential aggressors	2	2
identifying the resolution possibility of security-related issues	3	3

distinguishing between different types of risks, threats, and vulnerabilities	2	2
<b>OS5 contributing to the resolution of national security problems</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
willingness to give up liberties	<1	<1
willingness to become part of the security system	1	3
Civic activism	2	2
<b>Other aspects</b>	<b>&gt;1</b>	<b>&gt;1</b>
the credibility of information sources	1	1
Resistance to manipulation	1	1
Getting involved	2	2
the crystallization of opinions on national security	1	1
<b>Average</b>	≈1,66	≈1,83

Equaling this estimated result of the security culture with a grade, according to the Romanian grading system, it would be 5 or 6 which corresponds with a C or C – in the American grading system. All in all, we could conclude that the level of security culture is dangerously low in relation to the resulted value, similar to “functional illiteracy” specific to the Romanian educational system, a problem comprised by the National Defense Strategy (2020). This level that we can call “security illiteracy” might be improved though preparation programs, reason for which the experimental group will be subjected to in the next phases of the research, an ameliorative program entitled “5 minutes of security culture”.

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