

# RESILIENCE AND CURRENT SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: PERSPECTIVES FOR REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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**Abstract:** The notion of *resilience* has become a buzzword for various areas of activity. Different stakeholders such as states, communities, civil society, international organisations, etc. interpret resilience in a broad spectrum of contexts, thus generating debates on what *resilience* is and how it can be used. The approach to resilience from the viewpoint of a system's functionality is relevant to security studies. In the context of the current security environment, security decisions are adopted from an *adaptive* and *emergent* perspective, demanding the effort of the entire government and, increasingly, of the whole society. Such an approach contributes to resilience in face of the influence of external factors of foreign powers, which shifted from the perspective of economic and energy influence to successfully using both a new and an old perspective, such as the spread of fake news and disinformation as a means of information warfare that is one of the hybrid threats. *Resilience* shall not be considered an alternative to security. On the contrary, it is an innovative way of ensuring it.

**Keywords:** resilience, security strategy, security environment, human security. resilience index.

## ***Introduction***

In times of multiple crises *resilience* has become a popular term for describing one of the preconditions for countering all possible challenges from the individual to the societal level, from state to regional and international organizations. Following this logic, *reinforcing resilience* was made a guiding principle of the European Union and its Partnership policies regarding Eastern neighbours. Alongside the global pandemic, the Europe experienced large-scale political violence from the brutal crackdown on the Belarusian Revolution to renewed war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, as

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well as Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, which has marked a turning point in European politics (Mussning, 2023).

However, is resilience really a universal solution to this set of complex challenges? The answer to this question is based on concrete situations and on the specificity of the state and of the organisations. However, the need for resilience strengthening is visible in times of crisis. Lesson learned from the pandemic period – the response to crises needed to establish cross-border cooperation and solidarity mechanisms to effectively manage crises and protect people. This has contributed to the understanding that any state or organization must be ready to face acute crises of a different nature, which could be multifaceted or hybrid, have cascading effects or occur simultaneously (European Council, 2022).

It is also important to find an answer to the question: what does it mean to be a resilient state? Because the states are different and the internal and external security environments for them are different, respectively the understanding of resilience seems to be different. But one thing is certain: resilience is the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges, but also to undergo transitions in a sustainable and democratic manner (European Council, 2022).

In the context of war in Ukraine, the terms resilience and security started to be more and more discussed together, as war or armed conflict is one of the most severe human-made adversities. Nevertheless, if speaking about the current war, the security environment becomes more and more complex and interdependent. This leads to a series of associated crises, like the energy or food crises. At the same time, the war in Ukraine has shown how poorly prepared Europe is for an unpredictable event, but also that two major responses (distress and resilience) may simultaneously characterize the Ukrainian population, who face a war that threatens their independence and survivability as a nation. Accordingly, as long as hope to survive and successfully overcome adversity still exists in such stressful situations, feelings of resilience and identification with the individual's country will likely prevail, despite the perceived threat, distress symptoms, and destruction caused to individuals and communities (Kimhi et al., 2023).

The military invasion of the Russian Federation (RF) in Ukraine has multiple implications for the national security of the republic of Moldova, both in terms of having a war at the border, and of facing the consequences of the domestic vulnerabilities. In this context, the Republic of Moldova should seriously consider the need to strengthen the national resilience, especially from the point of view of hybrid threats from the side of the RF.

## ***Resilience and Security: theoretical account***

Lately, the notion of *resilience* has become a buzzword for various areas of activity. Different stakeholders such as states, communities, groups of interest, civil society, international organisations, etc. interpret resilience in a broad spectrum of contexts, thus generating debates on what *resilience* is and how it can be used. Moreover, the degree of understanding of this concept is contextual and differs from one field to another. Thus, experts borrowed the term *resilience* from psychology to define *a person's capacity to adapt rapidly, through learning and with less stress, to a tragedy, problem, or failure*. Then, the concept migrated from ecology and engineering to *disaster* research – an interdisciplinary domain that implies the contribution of engineers and scientists to the social sphere. Therefore, *the focus was put on resilience from the perspective of human communities*, including from the point of view of the infrastructure systems allowing these to function. Thus, the approach to resilience from the viewpoint of a system's functionality is relevant to security studies as well.

Aside the fact that there are several approaches on *resilience*, but for the security sector, it is believed that *resilience* is important from the point of view of systems' capacity (-) *to face /stand up to* the challenges of the outside world (resistance/persistence of systems' functionality – close attention shall be paid to critical infrastructure elements); (-) *to adapt* to the growing changes of a system or of an evolving situation related to the security environment; (-) *to change* or *transform*, meaning, to become stronger when new security challenges emerge.

At the same time, it is recognised that resilience is about the *survival of society, government, key attributes and services* to the population under conditions of major crisis, disruptive events and catastrophic civil emergencies. The approach is by no means trivial and does not simply involve *limiting existing vulnerabilities* of institutions and society or *mitigating the effects of threats and risks* or the normal capacity to *absorb the impact of crises* (Chifu, 2021).

From this perspective, resilience tends to relate to two broad topics, which are relevant to the field of security and defence:

The **first** refers to the capacity/ability of a country to respond immediately and under pressure to a disaster or emergency. This is often a top-down approach, focusing primarily on the government's ability to respond to and recover from civil emergencies (accidents, natural hazards or man-made threats) through warning and informing the public,

communicating before and during emergencies, and working with the media.

The **second topic** is particularly relevant to security threats and highlights how communities or civil society can build resilience to disasters or terrorist incidents, for example, and encourage the participation of other citizens in emergency management systems and processes.

Both top-down and bottom-up approaches can be used here, proposing a definition of resilience that focuses both on governmental abilities to prepare for and respond to threats, and also on the resilience of the broader society after upheaval, suffering, or adversity (Malik; Ehsan, 2020, p. 8). As a relevant example might be the Canadian government, which has integrated the concept of *community resilience* into emergency management strategies, where resilience is defined as being built *through a process of empowering citizens, responders, organizations, communities, governments, systems, and society to share responsibility for preventing hazards from becoming disasters* (Public Safety Canada, 2019). Thus, some states, given the diversity, complexity and unpredictability of contemporary hazards and that complete security is impossible to guarantee, are increasingly shifting their emphasis in security policy to mitigation rather than prevention.

Some countries within the European Union have already integrated the concept of resilience into their security policies, for example, Estonia has developed the National Security Concept (2017) by integrating two approaches - the comprehensive paradigm and the idea of resilience. This helped to reinforce the idea that *national defence should be a common task of the whole society* (Veebel, 2018). Such an approach contributes to resilience in face of the influence of external factors, in particular, of foreign powers, which shifted from the perspective of economic and energy influence to successfully using both a new and an old perspective, such as the spread of fake news and disinformation as a means of information warfare that is one of the hybrid threats. However, *resilience* shall not be considered an alternative to national security. On the contrary, it is an innovative way of ensuring it. This potential new perspective on security should be much more flexible and allow deterring and countering hybrid adversaries with a wide range of tools, resulting from the interconnection between the civilian (public and private) and military sectors (Frunzeti; Bărbulescu, 2018).

The Republic of Moldova is drafting a new National Security Strategy, which will presumably be approached through the lens of *human security* and *resilience*. There is currently a common understanding at the institutional level on the need to adapt the National Security Policy to the challenges of the current security environment, as well as the

need to review from a practical perspective the national programmes in relation to the state's risk management capabilities, and national defence capabilities, ranging from the military to the civilian component.

Thus, resilience from a security perspective may have different meanings and the challenges to it may be different. In the national security arena, Fjäder argues that resilience challenges the traditional role of the state as a security provider. A broad range of other actors on different levels come into play, reflecting the variety of domains covered by resilience. Resilience can incorporate issues from public health and social cohesion to industrial disasters and terrorism. In terms of its scope and objectives, it far overreaches a government or military authority. Resilience also aims to go beyond the material dimension of security by highlighting the interconnectedness of the natural, environmental, demographic and social domains (Svitková, 2017, p. 26). In addition, there is a need to structure resilience in several intermediate levels or dimensions, such as at the household, regional (or ethnic) or organisational level. With this logic in mind, resilience can have a different nature, depending on the set of issues.

Also, from a security perspective, depending on vulnerabilities, risks and threats, *resilience* can be an effective tool in mitigating the impact of hazards and threats to national security in general and to sectoral components such as *cyber security*, *economic security* or *energy security* in particular. It can also be used in a more complex context of human security by empowering individuals to cope with problematic or catastrophic situations generated by global hazards. From Moldova's perspective, the capacity to ensure national security is significantly influencing the country's image, which is particularly relevant both in the context of the neutral status declared in the country's Constitution and in the context of global threats (e.g., the aftermath of the pandemic), regional threats (extension of the war in Ukraine) and local and internal threats (the presence of Russian troops in the country or attempts to destabilise public order). These threats require coordination and cooperation at all levels of activities within the national security system.

In addition, Moldova is extremely vulnerable in terms of energy security, which shows not only a lack of capacity to manage this sector, but also a lack of interest in using *resilience* as an impact mitigation measure. Resilience can be seen as an alternative to challenges that generate major crises and require innovative approaches. Having examined the use of *resilience* by international organisations, as part of their security agenda and as part of policymaking, we have revealed the following trends. The UN approach to resilience focuses on risk mitigation and disaster management and aims to provide an analytical framework of indicators to measure sustainability in this context. The

OECD highlights the need for cooperation between various communities in relation to risk management under the development strategies.

The European Union Global Strategy (2016) defines *resilience* as *the capacity of states and societies to be reformed, thus being resilient and recovering after internal and external crises*. The 2020 Strategic Foresight Report puts forward resilience as a new compass for EU policies. Resilience is defined as *the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges but also to undergo transitions, in a sustainable, fair, and democratic manner*. This narrative takes a multidisciplinary perspective and adopts a wide, 360-degrees approach. Building a more resilient society calls for strengthening the mechanisms of shock absorption and enhancing the capacity for adaptation and transformation (European Commission, 2020).

As regards NATO's perspective on resilience in defence and security, it evolves towards the inclusion of a multidimensional set of vulnerabilities and mitigation strategies as part of the military and non-military response mechanisms. Bearing in mind the intensification of terrorist and hybrid threats, the strong point of NATO's resilience agenda concerns civil preparedness. Cyber security is one of the areas where NATO could use its collective power to approach critical vulnerabilities of its allies and individual partners to build their resilience.

### ***Resilience from the perspective of Republic of Moldova in the context of the current security environment***

During the 2023 World Economic Forum on security in Europe, held in Davos (Switzerland), in the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, took part in a discussion focused on the effects of the war in Ukraine on European states and on solutions to strengthen the resilience of countries in the region. One of these consequences is the energy crisis, which Moldova is addressing, including by reducing dependence on Russian gas, but there are other problems amplified by the war waged by Russia. One such problem is *propaganda and disinformation, which is a problem for many countries, and we need to learn together how to be more effective in countering them*. The same Wednesday, during the panel dedicated to Europe's leadership in a fragmented, war-torn world, the President Maia Sandu stressed that the solidarity shown by the European Union in the context of the crisis exacerbated by the war in Ukraine has enabled Europe to resist, strengthen its resilience and demonstrate that the values of democracy and freedom can be defended.

Actually, we cannot ignore the fact that states must improve crisis communication and step up the fight against disinformation. And the

Republic of Moldova is vulnerable to this aspect. One of the key problems inherited from the Soviet period is an education system that does not prioritize the development of critical and independent thinking skills. The information space of the Republic of Moldova (info-media) is exposed to external and internal disinformation activities. Traditionally, the Russian Federation promotes various manipulative narratives, and the key vulnerabilities of the Moldova are related to the significant exposure to and popularity of Russian television channels among wide spheres of the Moldovan society, as well as the absolute dominance of the Russian media in the Transnistrian region, in the Gagauzia autonomous region, and among ethnic minorities. An important role is also played by the high levels of trust of the population in the Orthodox Church of Moldova, which is extremely conservative and is part of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchy (Pistrinciuc et al., 2021).

From geopolitical perspective, the Russian Federation uses some history-based 'messianic' projects in order to adopt an expansionist and neo-imperial policy promoted by the geopolitician Dughin A. He was the one advocating for approximating particular cultures and ideologies that were totally opposed to maintain the tradition of a great power for Russia. At the same time, the geopolitical laboratory of Dughin A. takes the role of geopolitical laboratory of the Church and of a special historical mission that the Russian state has planned to realise. This is actually encompassed in their expansionist actions in Ukraine. Thus, A. Dughin (CAIRN International, 2022) or A. Podberezkin (Подберезкин, 2019). speak about Moscow as a successor of the Byzantine Empire and of the status of the Third Rome. The selfishness of Russian Orthodox culture, the status of a state in the *near abroad* (the Russian Federation's area of interest) and the demonization of Europe lead us to claim that Moscow behaves like a contemporary Tatar-Mongol empire. And the project of a Byzantine core-state and Russia's expansionist role are expressed not only in its films, media, literature, but also in its security and defence strategies, including military.

At the same time, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has tragically shown that a soft power approach is insufficient to counter military aggression and it may also have given a new dimension to the notion of resilience. Until the beginning of 2020, people who focused on societal resilience kept talking about the need for a better preparedness and especially for more education of the public. And it's crucial to bear in mind that societal resilience is not just a government activity. Resilience is the responsibility of the whole of society, and fortunately a great deal is happening there (Demsey, (2022)). For example, recent experience has demonstrated how a sense of solidarity and trust as elements of social cohesion enhanced efficiency in addressing the refugee crises in Moldova (approximately 3.5% of the country's population is represented by refugees).

In this context, we cannot overlook indicators allowing us to measure the resilience of the states, as, for example, the *Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index* (SCORE) which is an innovative tool designed to measure the sustainability of peace in societies around the world. SCORE examines two main components of peace - *reconciliation* and *social cohesion* - and the complex relationship between them. In 2018, it found that overall social cohesion in the country was fragile when oligarchs and a socialist president, *proxy actors* of the Russian Federation, with negative attitudes towards women and poor social tolerance, were at the helm (ONU, 2020). Social cohesion is also affected by the Transnistrian problem. In addition, the impossibility of controlling the districts on the left bank of the Dniester affects the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the region (e.g., access to justice, freedom of movement, freedom of expression) and limits the possibility of ensuring human security for all Moldovan citizens in situations of cross-border or asymmetric threats.

Thus, there is a correlation between democracy, human security and resilience. When we refer to democracy, we look at the quality of the regime, as the Russian Federation also considers itself a democratic state, but according to the democracy score developed by Freedom House, in 2023 Russia has been assessed as a state with Consolidated Authoritarian Regime (Freedom House, 2023). Previously, under the pro-Russian regime, the Democracy Score for 2015, according to *Freedom House*, was 4.86, on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represented the highest democratic progress and 7 the lowest, and the regime's rating being *transitional government* or *hybrid regime* (Freedom House, 2016). Moldova's low democracy index was driven by fraud in the banking system, corruption and the enormous influence of businessmen in politics and governance, including the issue of lack of control over the territory on the left bank of Nistru river where political rights in 2015 score 10 out of 40 and civil rights 14 out of 60.

At the same time, the approach from the *perspective of small states* is still relevant. According to author Barry Buzan, a small state's security is determined by external factors, by global or continental processes, dominant relations between certain major powers or policies promoted by certain major powers towards small states (Buzan, 2007). Hence the geopolitical perspective of small states, as for the Republic of Moldova the strategic choice of the development vector, such as European integration, is vital. As regards the Republic of Moldova, a candidate country to the EU in the summer of 2022, it is already assumed that it is going through a serious process of accession to European values and implementation of reforms. Thus, recently, on 14 October 2021, the Moldovan Parliament has approved the ratification of the *Convention of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating violence*



*against women and domestic violence* (Istanbul Convention). Moldova signed the Istanbul Convention on 6 February 2017, but did not hasten to ratify it. There were many excuses, but even more scaremongers were present that different parties banked on. The Istanbul Treaty was signed by 45 countries and subsequently ratified by 34.

Currently, women represent at least 40% of the country's parliament and all local and municipal councils. Moldova has achieved significant milestones in recent years in its efforts towards democracy, transparency, and sustainable growth. For example, The Economist's Democracy Index has upgraded Moldova from *hybrid regimes* to *flawed democracies* in 2021, with further improvements in 2022. Moldova places the fight against corruption among its top priorities. Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International, 2022) ranked the country as one of the five most significant movers, achieving its best score in a decade. Despite a global decline in the rule of law for the fifth consecutive year, Moldova managed to move up five places on the 2022 Rule of Law Index of the World Justice Project (World Justice Project, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, war contributes to resilience, but we need to build resilience systematically building clear leadership and cooperation mechanisms to foster unity of effort. In this context, the European Assembly organised at the national level in 2023 on May 21 could be a part of the resilience toolkit of the entire society in Moldova. In this context, I would like to emphasize that for resolving or at least mitigating the vulnerabilities that undermine Moldova's resilience, it requires to increase the public trust in state institutions and decision-makers. One way to improve the preparedness of institutions in the face of a crisis, in the context of Russian Federation interest to keep power in the region, from the local authorities to the national law enforcement sector and to counter corruption through zero tolerance policies, capacity-building and the empowerment of the integrity agency. A reliable general prosecutor and court system are also of the essence. The state's response capacity requires a solid mechanism of early warning systems and crisis management in the field of hybrid or conventional threats.

If we refer to practical aspects, we cannot neglect that on March 24 the EU Council established the EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova under the Common Security and Defence Policy. The objective of this civilian mission is to enhance the resilience of the security sector of the country in the areas of *crisis management* and *hybrid threats*, including *cybersecurity*, and countering foreign information manipulation and interference. We could see that the linkages between societal resilience and cybersecurity are only going to grow closer.

The resilience agenda also covers aspects related to *civil protection*, which is a complex phenomenon, from *food security* to *resilience against physical* and *digital risks*, and the protection of critical infrastructure is becoming a common topic at the European level. But for Moldova, it continues to be more complicated to be resilient in the context of the *weaponization of energy* for political purposes of Russian Federation.

At the same time, various dimensions of resilience must be considered when planning action to support states in this complex geopolitical environment: promoting resilience in the Republic of Moldova requires more proactive and effective policies, but also more political commitment and smart resource allocation. The ability of societies to withstand and adapt to crises and emergencies is an essential element of national security and defence. The definitions of resilience often posit three phases: preparation, response, and recovery. This implies that resilience is not the result of a single effort or initiative, but rather of a long-term, ongoing effort and investment that changes over time.

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