FROM TOTALITARIAN LEGACY TO COLLECTIVE SECURITY: A CONSTRUCTIVIST AND CLA-BASED STUDY OF EASTERN NATO COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *In this article, our objective is to conduct a comparative analysis regarding the national security laws in Romania, Poland and Lithuania, countries that, in the past, had totalitarian regimes in place. Currently, all these countries are members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The purpose of this article is to examine both the legislative convergences and divergences, emphasizing the major impact of the regulatory system on collective security. The study harmoniously combines the perspective of the Copenhagen School and elements of constructivism, in order to provide effective legislative solutions, adapted, in particular, to the new geopolitical circumstances.*

Keywords*: constructivism; intercultural context; CLA-based study; sovereignty; self-determination*

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on the premise that "Security regimes are defined as sets of norms, rules and decision-making procedures" (Krasner, 1983: 2) in the field of security and from the fact that they promote stability in an international system, since cooperating states refrain from expanding conflicts and consider peace as a less costly option (Jervis, 1982:360-362, *apud* Krahman, 2003:7), we can say that a legislative analysis regarding the security field of the states concerned, the historical context and the interactions between them, is more than opportune to exemplify how they achieve a common front against different forms of threat. In the case of Romania, Poland and Lithuania, the experiences of totalitarian regimes have crystallized the normative and institutional responses. Cooperation within NATO and the EU reflects even better the need to understand the convergence of rules and procedures, in a current tense context.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order for a society to really be able to enter the category of those organized and democratically governed, it is mandatory to observe certain basic rules or principles, taken as a unitary whole, which can take concrete forms, depending on the respective stage and the historical conditions of each country (Mihai & Pahonțu, 2009:213).

These authors recall some of the principles that should not be evaded, namely the existence of a solid normative framework to have *sedes materiae,* which would represent the foundation, in the fight against the various threats, regulated by a fundamental law - the Constitution - in which the fundamental rights and freedoms of man and peoples, the equality of rights of all citizens and peoples are provided, with legislative guarantees that these rights and freedoms can be freely expressed and exercised. Another principle lies in the existence of the separation of powers in the state; the legislative power, the executive power, respectively the judicial power.

For historical reasons, the separation of powers in the state appeared as a necessity and as a guarantee against totalitarianism, a regime that distanced us as a state from everything related to Western European values, in which electoral elections were constantly rigged, compared to the fact that there was no option for citizens to vote universally, direct, secret and freely expressed the leader.

Another principle to which the aforementioned authors appeal is the right of citizens to use alternative sources of information, protected by law, and the existence of means of information (mass-media), which manifest themselves freely.

By the free manifestation it must be understood that an organ of information independently exercises the position it adopts, without the state power, in particular, imposing a certain line on the basis of censorship.

In a context in which Romania is developing annually, in which it has begun to define more and more its position within European alliances, such as NATO and the EU, and to collaborate with all the states that are part of these organizations, it is natural that there are interests and influences from other states motivated by the elimination *of the international status quo* that would affect the collaboration between the Romanian state and the other member states.

As a consequence, in the current context, we must implicitly take into account "the new vulnerabilities acquired by developed and democratic societies, based on sophisticated electronic systems, used in almost all areas of social activity, including national security and defense, exposed to new risks, of a modern nature. It is increasingly evident that for both democratic states with open societies and those with authoritarian regimes, information and communication technologies make it almost impossible - and this will be amplified - for the intervention or centralized control of the state over individuals or groups of different natures, including ethnic or religious (Mihai & Pahonțu, 2009:352).

Taking this phrase as a reference, we can admit that it is essential to quickly identify the various threats, so that measures can be taken against them. The measures derive from the existence of a varied legislative framework and through international cooperation between states. Through good cooperation, states contribute to collective security.

Prior to addressing the various doctrinal concepts, we must specify that the Supreme Constitutional Court of Romania has approached, in several decisions, the concept of national security, viewed distinctly from several perspectives. Thus, we intend to specify that by decision no. 455/2018, "The Court held that the term "*national security*" is a plurivalent one and that, from the perspective of art. 53, para. (1) of the Constitution, one can speak of the military, economic, financial, information technology, social security of the country. Also, in the CCR decision. 455/2018, it was found that the security of networks and information systems is a matter of national security, the Court operating again with the notion of securitization, this time in the field of information systems (Popa, 2020).

By CCR Decision no. 872/2010, the Court certifies that the notion of national security is a constitutional concept and that an element of it is the state of balance and economic stability. Thus, it is considered that national security does not refer exclusively to the military situation, but also extends to the social and economic component. In this regard, the exercise of citizens' rights and freedoms, as provided for under Article 53 of the country's fundamental law, may be restricted in exceptional situations. Regarding to the brief introduction, as a preliminary matter, we are going to address the fundamental information in the field of law, national security and communication.

From the point of view of intelligence analysis, conducting a comparative analysis study between the legislations of the different states that had a totalitarian regime is relevant for societal security requires reference to the reference object of securitization.

> While the reference object refers to what is threatened, securitization is the political and discursive process by which an intersubjective agreement is created within the political community on what represents a threat to the reference object, demanding urgent and exceptional measures to remove it (Weaver, 2008:582).

Identifying the elements that can constitute reference objects in the context of societal security requires reviewing the debates that aimed to define them. Thus, we intend to approach within the research different theories, respectively concepts that are the object of our study regarding national and collective security.

The Copenhagen school different theories: (1) Security sectors (multisectoral approach); (2) Regional Security Complex Theory (TCRS); and (3) Securitization theory. In order to explain these concepts, the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSTC) was first proposed by Barry Buzan (1983) in the first edition of his volume *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations.* More recent developments are due to the Copenhagen school, in particular the collaboration between Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (2003). TCRS argues that the actions and motivations of international security actors are deeply rooted at the regional level – the main concerns of the actors are related to the immediate vicinity (proximity/contiguity) of the actor.The security of each actor in the security complex interacts with the security of the other actors. Among the reference works of the researchers

involved in the Copenhagen School is *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, published by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde (1998), probably the most influential work of the school, which synthesizes the most important ideas.

By comparison, in terms of realist theory, security has remained statocentric, focused on military power and military threats involving the use of force (McDonald, 2008:200). Although there have been differences between the multiple variants of realism, the debate on security has remained concerned with the character of relations between states, sharing the perspective that they remain unchanged, and changes – when they occur, occur in repetitive patterns tag (Elman, 2008:16). In the liberalist conception and other theories derived from this vision, the debate on security had as central concerns the maintenance of peace at the international level and the role of international organizations in reducing the conflict, by influencing the behaviors of states (Navarri, 2008:29-43).

From the very beginning, we understand to rally to the point of view of one author, according to which constructivism is a social theory, not a substantial one, which means that it focuses on understanding the relationship between agents (such as states) and structures (such as international norms), rather than on explaining specific models in world politics. Unlike substantive theories such as those that explain why democracies rarely wage war, constructivism examines how common ideas, norms, and beliefs shape the international system. It shares similarities with rational choice theory, which provides a framework for understanding how actors pursue fixed preferences under constraints, but does not define the content of those preferences or constraints.

Constructivism emphasizes the role of human consciousness, collective ideas, and interpretations in shaping material realities. For example, the concept of the balance of power is not an objective truth, but a social construction debated by states. While theory recognizes structural forces, it also allows agency, recognizing that interactions between actors can transform global structures. At its core, constructivism sees the world as a dynamic interaction between common ideas and individual actions, with rules and interpretations that lead to change (Baylis *et al.*, 2020:197).

Alexander Wendt, the one who extended conventional constructivist theory based on liberal premises, asserted that international institutions can reshape the identities and interests of the state.

He argued that debates in international relations have shifted from focusing on human nature to examining how state actions are shaped by "structure" (anarchy and distribution of power), "process" (interaction and learning), and institutions.

In the meantime, the Copenhagen School has extended the concept of security beyond the military dimension, applying it to the social, political, economic and environmental levels. Barry Buzan (1983) identified five key sectors of national security: military, political, economic, social, and environmental, offering a more comprehensive approach than state-centered realism. His studies have placed societal security at the heart of the European agenda, highlighting identity as a primary value for the security of society, while sovereignty remains the central criterion for state security. Buzan and Weaver conceptualized this relationship as a "parallel duality" between the state and society, proposing that concerns about the security of society focus on collective identities rather than just the individual (Buzan, 1997:19-20).

There is no doubt that security, according to the vision of the Copenhagen School (Buzan, 1997:16-17), must be seen in the context of "international security". In the absence of such a vision, we consider that our legislative analysis would remain devoid of purpose and would outline the idea that interstate threats do not represent common objectives. The same author admitted that there are implicit disadvantages of the study of security in several sectors. These disadvantages are represented by the need to mobilize the state for more problems and the raising of the term security to the level of universal good.

In the opinion of the theorists of the Copenhagen School, the security of society is based on the identification of specific types of threats, including migration, horizontal competition, depopulation and vertical competition (Buzan *et al.*, 1998:121-122).

However, this approach is not without criticism. McSweeney challenges the choice of "identity" as the primary value that defines the security of society, suggesting that other elements may also be relevant in this context. In contrast, Nordic theorists, drawing on the traditions of the welfare state in the region, emphasize the importance of transnational protection of interconnected infrastructures (Larsson & Rhinard, 2021:8). In this functionalist approach, the focus shifts from cultural identities to the protection of vital social functions (Rhinard, 2020:23-26).

In the political realm, existential threats are often related to sovereignty, the fundamental principle of the state. Sovereignty can be threatened by forces that challenge the legitimacy, recognition, or governance of the state. Buzan argues that the main objective of society's security is the protection of collective identities that can function independently of the state, such as nations or religions. These identities are influenced by both internal and external developments, making existential threats more difficult to identify. For example, migrants or rival identities can become subjects of securitization, perceived as threats depending on the type of society (closed or open to change).

The next section will explore the concept of sovereignty from a legal perspective, especially in the context of public international law, and will address other aspects of Security, viewed from a transdisciplinary dimension.

From a legal point of view, a first concept that we must bring to the fore is that of sovereignty (Geamănu, 1967:37). Sovereignty

> is currently the fundamental concept of international law, given that international law is expression of the agreement made between sovereign states (the main element on which it is built today the state and international organization). Sovereignty is internal (supremacy) and external (independence) (Năstase *et al.*, 2012:53).

From this concept, several principles emerge in a very clear manner. A first principle is that of self-determination, consisting in the right of peoples to determine their own fate. It has its origin in the United Nations Declaration of 1970, which affirms the equality of peoples, respectively the right to determine their own fate. Thus, in the context of our research topic, the people are the only ones in a position to determine their own fate, without there being other subjects of international law. Therefore, according to the above-mentioned declaration, "all peoples have the right to decide their political status, in complete freedom and without interference from outside".

We are obliged to emphasize that the principle of self-determination should not be confused with the principle of non-interference in internal affairs (non-interference). Inspired by the

> Calvo, Drago Doctrines, 1866 and 1902, it represents the obligation of states not to intervene in matters that fall within the national competence of a state (Năstase *et al.*, 2012:55).

It emphasizes, in an even more eloquent manner, the fact that any intervention, be it military, political, economic or cultural, is inadmissible.

In this context, we believe that the principle enshrined in Article 2 (2) of the UN Charter, Article 29 of the Vienna Convention, which consists in the fulfillment in good faith of international obligations (*pacta sunt servanda) should be implicitly* highlighted. Therefore, it is an obligation, without a trace of subterfuge, for states to resort to legal norms and good conduct, so that there are no violations of the provisions enshrined in the law.

Another concept to which we intend to refer is freedom of expression, as it is regulated in the light of the provisions of Article 53 of the Constitution and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This concept is found not only in the fundamental law of our country, but also in the legislations of the states under analysis. Indeed, an essential condition for democracy and for any state to develop, political pluralism is, without a doubt, a *sine qua non condition.* The question that arises is whether, however, free speech, which, Of course, it includes freedom of opinion and the freedom to receive or communicate information, it is likely to be circumvented by normative acts and in what contexts.

We consider that free expression is used as a vital condition for progress, however, the authorities must intervene exclusively in the situation in which the desire to restore the involution is found. The finding is a natural one, because the right to expression is not absolute, but relative. That is why the authors of the European Convention on Human Rights added to Article 10 a derogatory clause in paragraph 2 of the text, which allows interference by state authorities with cumulative compliance with three conditions: (1) the interference must be provided for by law, (2) the interference must be aimed at one of the express legitimate purposes mentioned in Article 10 (national security, territorial integrity or public security, the defense of public order and the prevention of crime, the disclosure of confidential information or to guarantee the authority and impartiality of the judiciary), (3) the interference is necessary in a democratic society.

Therefore, free expression is subsumed to the concept of "information". The judicial bodies in Strasbourg considered that "information" includes "those produced deliberately, such as radio and television programs (ECHR, 1994), music (ECHR, 1990), advertising messages and commercial speech:

Thus, at European level, freedom of expression goes beyond the limits of political, philosophical or religious discourse, it is not defined by the content, quality or importance of the information, but by the way it is formulated, and comes into play as soon as the information, regardless of its nature, borrows a medium intended to make it public (Sudre, 2006:353).

Within the research topic, we intend to share the point of view belonging to an author who states that

the fact that there is certain information that is covered by various forms of protection based on state, service or professional secrecy, does not mean an automatic prohibition on revealing such information to the public, especially when this information concerns areas of major public interest (Chiriță, 2008:543).

From the point of view of the specific theory, a first paradigm that we want to mention is that of the Theory of Governance and Security. Thus, we can consider that

Security governance can be characterized as an intentional system of rules involving coordination, management (management) and regulation of security issues, by multiple and separate authorities, interventions of both public and private actors, formal and informal arrangements, directed with a specific purpose, in order to obtain precise benefits (Kirchner, 2006:950).

Based on these arguments, we must specify that there is an analytical purpose is to observe and understand (conceptually and theoretically) the overlapping of security mechanisms. This is followed by the practical-political/normative challenge, as the recognition of the coexistence and overlapping of different security orders and mechanisms raises questions about the possibility and future of the world order. Researchers and practitioners alike will have to grapple with these practical, policy, and normative questions in the years to come.

Firstly, our argument addresses the concepts of "balance of power" and "security community" not only as distinct analytical concepts of the security order, but also as mechanisms based on a specific combination of practices. Secondly, this approach opens up the possibility to take a varied view of regional security governance and to conceptualize the idea of overlap. Thirdly, our argument can contribute to better-informed and improved empirical research. For example, by focusing on the overlap of different types of security governance

systems and their associated practices, we could gain a clearer understanding of the structural drivers of security policies or whether a region can transition between security governance systems.

Finally, the argument about overlapping mechanisms significantly influences the way we think about regional boundaries. The traditional notions of geographical/geopolitical borders, as they are currently defined, are defined on the basis of location (answering the question "Where are we?"); social or cognitive notions of boundaries are related to identity (answering the question "Who are we/they?"); and the "practical" notion of boundaries that we develop here, with a focus on overlapping mechanisms, takes into account the practices found (answering the questions "What do we do") (Adler & Greve, 2009:59-84). It is important to treat this analysis implicitly through the prism of the theory of security governance, because, in the opinion of an author,

A security sector can be considered as dysfunctional if it does not provide security to the state and its people in an efficient and effective way or, even worse, if it is the cause of insecurity. Moreover, as a con sequence of the aforementioned broad definition, a security sector cannot be viewed as functional if it is deficient, it terms of governance. Thus, SSR is meant to reduce security deficits (inefficient and ineffective provision of security or even provision of insecurity) as well as democratic deficits (lack of oversight over the security sector) which result from dysfunctional security sectors. In other words, SSR is a means that serves the objective of providing 'security within the state in an effective and efficient manner, and in the framework of democratic civilian control'. (Hänggi, 2005:8).

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In the current context, in which the security challenges on NATO's Eastern Flank are increasingly complex, being aware of the importance that the regulatory framework has in building resilience, cooperation, respectively in combating various forms of threat, the methodological part of this article will be represented by Causal Layered Analysis (CLA). This is a qualitative method that can be applied to the countries under discussion. Being a prospective method, it will help us understand the perception and discursive analysis, both on the security of each state and on collective security.

Being developed by Sohail Inayatullah, the CLA has a structure consisting of 4 levels: The

first level, titled Litany is the level of the dominant narrative. The second level, the Systematic one, is the institutional level, of structural causes. The next level, entitled Worldview, represents the ideological framework. The last level, but not the last, is that of myth/metaphor, known as the symbolic level or cultural depth.

The present study was applied to a sample of 7 people. These are doctoral students, specialized in the field of national security and lawyers. Each answer was analyzed in an individual, comparative manner, while adhering to academic ethics and maintaining impartiality.

a) **Litany.** Having to answer the following question: What are the main perceived security threats and how are they presented in public discourses in the media? Out of the 7 (seven) respondents, 4 (four) indicated that the main threats come from Russia, as a result of the hybrid war it is waging against Poland, Lithuania and Romania. The other 3 (three) respondents agreed with the view that Russia is the main state that carries out hostile actions against the countries on NATO's Eastern flank, but believe that in addition to hybrid warfare, forced migration represents a growing threat. From the perspective of presentation of public discourses in the media, 6 (six) respondents considered that the discourse is predominantly defensive, alarmist, and 1 (one) respondent opined that the discourse places a lot of emphasis on human vulnerability and less on the ability to respond. We can appreciate that the answers are mostly homogeneous, with a strong consensus. Thus, 100% of respondents believe that Russia is the state that threatens the security of other countries. 100% of the selected experts consider hybrid warfare to be an imminent threat. Only 3 out of 7 experts mentioned migration as a threat: In my view, this layer is relevant, as it outlines the legitimate discourse of security policies and shares the framework of related legislation.

b) **System.** Regarding this layer, the respondents had to express a point of view on the current state of the security legislation in Lithuania, Romania and Poland, specifying, at the same time, the main systematic factors influencing the evolution of this regulatory framework. In this context, 1 out of 7 experts answered that the legislation in the states under analysis is in a continuous adaptability, being influenced by the dynamics of external threats. 4 respondents considered that the legislation is totally fragmented, not being able to counteract threats to collective security in a timely manner. 1 respondent considered that there is no strategic vision. In the opinion of this respondent, this is a major factor that delays any legislative reform. 1 respondent argued that legislation is capable of being adapted exclusively following critical events, as can be seen throughout history. When asked about the systemic factors identified, 7 out of 7 respondents said that geopolitical pressures (especially that of the war in Ukraine) are factors that attract radical legislative measures. Also, 5 out of 7 respondents said that the primacy of NATO norms is a guideline on legislation. 1 respondent considered that the influence of the media is often a determining factor for the adaptation of legislation. Only 1 expert mentioned the slowness of the decision-making process studied in the 3 states as a factor that hinders effective legislation. From the interpretation of the answers, we can see that, despite the fact that the legislations are not harmonized, there are legislative differences marked by the identity of each state, the systems are interdependent, all 3 states being NATO members. Also, states are fully aware that a security breach on a NATO state is an imminent danger to the implicit address of other states.

c) **Worldview - ideological and identity frameworks.** The selected experts were questioned on the role of national identity and history in the formulation of security policies, corroborating them with the vision of the alliances they belong to (EU and NATO). Thus, we expect that different visions regarding national identity, stability and alliances will emerge within this section. The answers received were extremely pertinent: 3 out of 7 respondents agreed with the point of view that the historical memory regarding the threats coming from the East attracted a clear orientation of the 3 states towards strategic alliances, such as NATO and the EU. 2 respondents stated that the identity of each state was strengthened in the period immediately following the accession of states to these alliances, opining that the strategic culture was implicitly shaped. Also, 1 respondent believes that in Romania, viewed from a comparative perspective with Lithuania and Poland, the identity dimension is not so pronounced. 1 Only one expert believed that the experience of totalitarian regimes determines a real representation of risks, thus directly influencing security policies.

d) **Myth/Metaphor**. When asked what metaphors can define the perception of the security of each state, the perceptions were eminently different. We appreciate that each respondent had a unique vision. In this case, we will analyze each metaphor related to each state:

Lithuania is viewed by 2 people as a "silent storm" Thus, this metaphor can designate a country that, although it does not produce dissension, is in permanent tension. Another metaphor is the "Phoenix Bird". Other phrases used are: "glass shield", symbolizing that although it is a fragile state, it is very well positioned from a strategic point of view and is very well supported internationally. Another perception of this state is that it is like a "lantern in the dark", symbolizing that it is a waking state, in an area of NATO perceived as dangerous. Another respondent believes that Lithuania is like an "Eastern window to Europe", suggesting a warning zone for all other EU member states. A final respondent believes that Lithuania is like a "Baltic watchman", having the duty to guard both the Baltic Sea and prevent any dangers to other areas of Europe.

Poland is the state seen by respondents as a "mirror of a dark past", referring to the security of this state, outlined in the light of the World Wars that affected it. Another respondent sees this state as "a bridge between what is new and what the past means". The metaphor "Smoldering Fire", I must admit, impressed me, as it indicates a felt tension that fuels insecurity. One respondent said that Poland can be classified as a "protective shield of the Baltic Sea", always ready to protect its borders. This country was implicitly characterized by the metaphors "The Power of the Baltic Sea", "Apparent Silence" or "With the Sword on the Table".

Romania, a country strategically positioned in the North Atlantic alliance, is viewed extremely beautifully by all respondents as a "gateway to the Carpathians", suggesting a metaphor between East and West. Another perspective on our country is that of a "suspension bridge". I interpret this metaphor as a phrase that reflects the bridge between the old and the new realities of security legislation. Also, one expert opines that Romania is a "NATO power", while another expert sees Romania as "a shadow of NATO", expressing the need for collective security. Another interesting metaphor is that of "at the crossroads of influences", expressing an area where different strategic interests intersect. Another person believes that Romania's appropriate metaphor is "the fortress under siege", expressing the country's potential vulnerability. Also, a pertinent phrase is the one that refers to Romania as "the barometer of any regional tension", expressing the fact that it is a strong country, which reacts in a prompt and efficient manner to all the changes to which it is subjected.

Considering the methodology presented, we can appreciate that this prospective method proved to be a valuable tool for exploring the way in which the normative discourse of security is built in states that had a totalitarian regime. The varied responses highlighted institutional and ideological realities, as well as interstate cooperation on threats. Thus, we can say that this methodological approach has given us the possibility to make an effective comparison of threats, starting from the critical-constructivist perspective.

2. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research successfully achieved its objective of conducting a comparative, multi-level analysis of the national security frameworks in Romania, Poland and Lithuania. The hypothesis that historical experiences, identity narratives and normative convergence within NATO and the EU significantly shape security perceptions and legislation was confirmed, by applying the Stratified Causal Analysis (CLA) method.

The results of this study reveal a nuanced convergence of discourses, institutional structures and symbolic representations in the three states. At the litany level, hybrid warfare and Russian influence emerge as dominant threats, while *systemic* analysis highlights legislative fragmentation countered by supranational pressure and strategic necessity. The *Worldview layer* emphasizes the role of collective memory and identity in shaping national orientation toward Western alliances, and the *Myth/Metaphor* layer uncovers deep-rooted symbolic constructs that reflect vulnerability, resilience, and strategic positioning.

This layered exploration uncovered not only functional and normative differences between states, but also a common perception of existential threats, especially from the eastern border. Respondents' views reveal how former totalitarian states are reinterpreting sovereignty, freedom of expression and legislative resilience in the light of past trauma and current geopolitical alignment.

As a final point, this research provides valuable insights concerning the construction of security and law-standards in post-totalitarian democracies. Only by understanding these national perspectives, we can build the collective resilience and anticipate the challenges in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

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